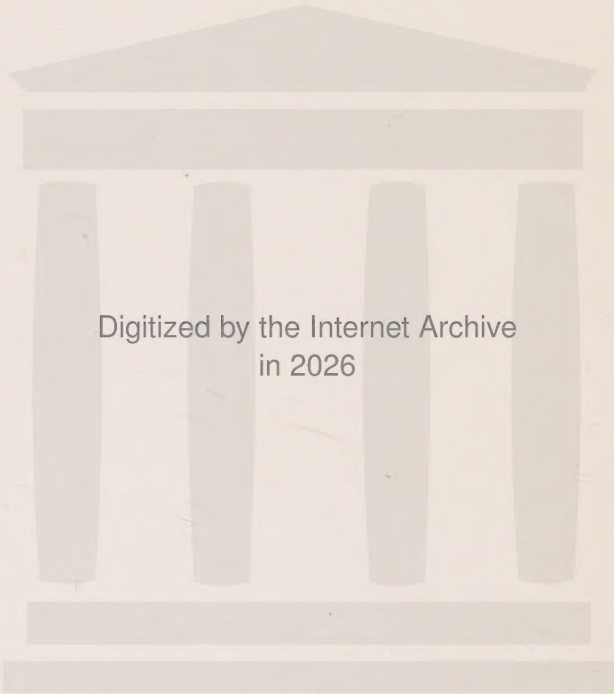
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AUTHORISED EDITION

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COMÉDIE HUMAINE

Edited by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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H. DE BALZAC

THE COUNTRY PARSON

(*Le Curé de Village*)

AND

THE RISE AND FALL OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

(*Grandeur et Décadence de César Birotteau*)

Translated by

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with Prefaces by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

LONDON

J. M. DENT & COMPANY

1898

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THE COUNTRY PARSON

PREFACE

PERHAPS in no instance of Balzac's work is his singular fancy for pulling that work about more remarkably instanced and illustrated than in the case of *Le Curé de Village*. The double date, 1837-1845, which the author attached to it, in his usual conscientious manner, to indicate these revisions, has a greater signification than almost anywhere else. When the book, or rather its constituent parts, first appeared in the *Presse* for 1839, having been written the winter before, not only was it very different in detail, but the order of the parts was altogether dissimilar. Balzac here carried out his favourite plan—a plan followed by many other authors no doubt, but always, as it seems to me, of questionable wisdom—that of beginning in the middle and then 'throwing back' with a long retrospective and explanatory digression.

In this version the story of Tascheron's crime and its punishment came first; and it was not till after the execution that the early history of Véronique (who gave her name to this part as to a *Suite du Curé de Village*) was introduced. This history ceased at the crisis of her life; and when it was taken up in a third part, called *Véronique au Tombeau*, only the present conclusion of the book, with her confession, was given. The long account

of her sojourn at Montignac, of her labours there, of the episode of Farrabesche, and so forth, did not appear till 1841, when the whole book, with the inversions and insertions just indicated, appeared in such a changed form, that even the indefatigable M. de Lovenjoul dismisses as 'impossible' the idea of exhibiting a complete picture of the various changes made. Nor was the author even yet contented; for in 1845, before establishing it in its place in the *Comédie*, he not only, as was his wont, took out the chapter-headings, leaving five divisions only, but introduced other alterations, resulting in the present condition of the book.

It is not necessary to dwell very much on the advantages or disadvantages of these changes. There is no doubt that, as has been said above, the trick of beginning the story in the middle, and then doubling back on the start, has many drawbacks. But, on the other hand, that of an introduction which has apparently very little to do with anything, and which has nothing whatever to do with the title of the book, has others; and I do not know that in the final reconstitution Balzac has made Véronique's part in the matter, even in her confession, as clear as it should be. It is indeed almost unavoidable that twisting and turning the shape of a story about, as he was wont to do, should bring the penalty of destroying, or at least damaging, its unity.

As the book stands it may be said to consist of three parts united rather by identity of the personages who act in them than by exact dramatic connection. There is, to take the title-part first (though it is by no means the most really important or pervading) the picture of the 'Curé de Village,' which is almost an exact, and

beyond doubt a designed, pendant to that of the 'Médecin de Campagne.' The Abbé Bonnet indeed is not able to carry out economic ameliorations, as Dr. Benassis is, personally, but by inducing Véronique to do so he brings about the same result, and on an even larger scale. His personal action (with the necessary changes for his profession) is also tolerably identical, and on the whole the two portraits may fairly be hung together as Balzac's ideal representations of the good man in soul-curing and body-curing respectively. Both are largely conditioned by his eighteenth-century fancy for 'playing Providence,' and by his delight in extensive financial-commercial schemes. I believe that in both books these schemes have been stumbling-blocks, if not to all readers, yet to a good many. But the beauty of the portraiture of the 'Curé' is nearly, if not quite equal, to that of the doctor, though the institution of celibacy has prevented Balzac from giving a key to the conduct of Bonnet quite as sufficient as that which he furnished for the conduct of Benassis.

The second part of the book is the crime—episodic as regards the criminal, cardinal as regards other points—of Tascheron. Balzac was very fond of 'his crimes'; and it is quite worth while in connection with his handling of the murder here to study the curious story of his actual interference in the famous Peytel case, which also interested Thackeray so much in his Paris days. The Tascheron case itself (which from a note appears to have been partly suggested by some actual affair) no doubt has interests for those who like such things, and the picture of the criminal in prison is very striking. But we see and know so very little of Tascheron himself, and even to the very last (which is long afterwards) we are

left so much in the dark as to his love for Véronique, that the thing has an extraneous air. It is like a short story foisted in.

This objection connects itself at once with a similar one to the delineation of Véronique. There is nothing in her conduct intrinsically impossible, or even improbable. A girl of her temperament, at once, as often happens, strongly sensual and strongly devotional, deprived of her good looks by illness, thrown into the arms of a husband physically repulsive, and after a short time not troubling himself to be amiable in any other way, might very well take refuge in the substantial, if not ennobling, consolations offered by a good-looking and amiable young fellow of the lower class. Her conduct at the time of the crime (her exact complicity in which is, as we have said, rather imperfectly indicated) is also fairly probable, and to her repentance and amendment of life no exception can be taken. But only in this last stage do we really *see* anything of the inside of Véronique's nature; and even then we do not see it completely. The author's silence on the details of the actual *liaison* with Tascheron has its advantages, but it also has its defects.

Still, the book is one of great attraction and interest, and takes, if I may judge by my own experience, a high rank for enchaining power among that class of Balzac's books which cannot be put exactly highest. If the changes made in it by its author have to some extent dislocated it as a whole, they have resulted in very high excellence for almost all the parts.

As something has necessarily been said already about the book-history of the *Curé de Village*, little remains but to give exact dates and places of appearance. The

Presse published the (original) first part in December-January 1838-39, the original second (*Véronique*) six months later, and the third (*Véronique au Tombeau*) in August. All had chapters and chapter-titles. As a book it was in its first complete form published by Souverain in 1841, and was again altered when it took rank in the *Comédie* six years later.

G. S.

THE COUNTRY PARSON

I

VÉRONIQUE

At the lower end of Limoges, at the corner of the Rue de la Vieille-Poste and the Rue de la Cité, there stood, some thirty years back, an old-fashioned shop of the kind that seems to have changed in nothing since the Middle Ages. The great stone paving-slabs, riven with countless cracks, were laid upon the earth; the damp oozed up through them here and there; while the heights and hollows of this primitive flooring would have tripped up those who were not careful to observe them. Through the dust on the walls it was possible to discern a sort of mosaic of timber and bricks, iron and stone, a heterogeneous mass which owed its compact solidity to time, and perhaps to chance. For more than two centuries the huge rafters of the ceiling had bent without breaking beneath the weight of the upper stories, which were constructed of wooden framework, protected from the weather by slates arranged in a geometrical pattern; altogether, it was a quaint example of a burgess's house in olden times. Once there had been carved figures on the wooden window-frames, but sun and rain had destroyed the ornaments, and the windows themselves stood all awry; some bent outwards, some bent in, yet others were minded to part company, and one and

all carried a little soil deposited (it would be hard to say how) in crannies hollowed by the rain, where a few shy creeping plants and thin weeds grew to break into meagre blossom in the spring. Velvet mosses covered the roof and the window-sills.

The pillar which supported the corner of the house, built though it was of composite masonry, that is to say, partly of stone, partly of brick and flints, was alarming to behold by reason of its curvature ; it looked as though it must give way some day beneath the weight of the superstructure whose gable projected fully six inches. For which reason the Local Authorities and the Board of Works bought the house and pulled it down to widen the street. The venerable corner pillar had its charms for lovers of old Limoges ; it carried a pretty sculptured shrine and a mutilated image of the Virgin, broken during the Revolution. Citizens of an archæological turn could discover traces of the stone sill meant to hold candlesticks and to receive wax tapers and flowers and votive offerings of the pious.

Within the shop a wooden staircase at the further end gave access to the two floors above and to the attics in the roof. The house itself, packed in between two neighbouring dwellings, had little depth from back to front, and no light save from the windows which gave upon the street, the two rooms on each floor having a window apiece, one looking out into the Rue de la Vieille-Poste, and the other into the Rue de la Cité. In the Middle Ages no artisan was better housed. The old corner shop must surely have belonged to some armourer or cutler, or master of some craft which could be carried on in the open air, for it was impossible for its inmates to see until the heavily ironed shutters were taken down and air as well as light freely admitted. There were two doors (as is usually the case where a shop faces into two streets), one on either side the pillar. But for the interruption of the white threshold stones,

hollowed by the wear of centuries, the whole shop front consisted of a low wall which rose to elbow height. Along the top of this wall a groove had been contrived, and a similar groove ran the length of the beam above, which supported the weight of the house wall. Into these grooves slid the heavy shutters, secured by huge iron bolts and bars; and when the doorways had been made fast in like manner, the artisan's workshop was as good as a fortress.

For the first twenty years of this present century the Limousins had been accustomed to see the interior filled up with old iron and brass, cart-springs, tires, bells, and every sort of metal from the demolition of houses; but the curious in the *débris* of the old town discovered, on a closer inspection, the traces of a forge in the place and a long streak of soot, signs which confirmed the guesses of archæologists as to the original purpose of the dwelling. On the first floor there was a living room and a kitchen, two more rooms on the second, and an attic in the roof, which was used as a warehouse for goods more fragile than the hardware tumbled down pell-mell in the shop.

The house had been first let and then sold to one Sauviat, a hawker, who from 1792 till 1796 travelled in Auvergne for a distance of fifty leagues round, bartering pots, plates, dishes, and glasses, all the gear, in fact, needed by the poorest cottagers, for old iron, brass, lead, and metal of every sort and description. The Auvergnat would give a brown earthen pipkin worth a couple of sous for a pound weight of lead or a couple of pounds of iron, a broken spade or hoe, or an old cracked saucepan; and was always judge in his own cause, and gave his own weights. In three years' time Sauviat took another trade in addition, and became a tinman.

In 1793 he was able to buy a château put up for sale by the nation. This he pulled down; and doubtless repeated a profitable experiment at more than one point in his sphere of operations. After a while these first essays of his gave him an idea; he suggested a piece of

business on a large scale to a fellow-countryman in Paris; and so it befell that the *Black Band*, so notorious for the havoc which it wrought among old buildings, was a sprout of old Sauviat's brain, the invention of the hawker whom all Limoges had seen for seven-and-twenty years in his tumbledown shop among his broken bells, flails, chains, brackets, twisted leaden gutters, and heterogeneous old iron. In justice to Sauviat, it should be said that he never knew how large and how notorious the association became; he only profited by it to the extent of the capital which he invested with the famous firm of Brézac.

At last the Auvergnat grew tired of roaming from fair to fair and place to place, and settled down in Limoges, where, in 1797, he had married a wife, the motherless daughter of a tinman, Champagnac by name. When the father-in-law died, he bought the house in which he had, in a manner, localised his trade in old iron, though for some three years after his marriage he had still made his rounds, his wife accompanying him. Sauviat had completed his fiftieth year when he married old Champagnac's daughter, and the bride herself was certainly thirty years old at the least. Champagnac's girl was neither pretty nor blooming. She was born in Auvergne, and the dialect was a mutual attraction; she was, moreover, of the heavy build which enables a woman to stand the roughest work; so she went with Sauviat on his rounds, carried loads of lead and iron on her back, and drove the sorry carrier's van full of the pottery on which her husband made usurious profits, little as his customers imagined it. La Champagnac was sunburned and high-coloured. She enjoyed rude health, exhibiting when she laughed a row of teeth large and white as blanched almonds, and, as to physique, possessed the bust and hips of a woman destined by Nature to be a mother. Her prolonged spinsterhood was entirely due to her father; he had not read Molière,

but he raised Harpagon's cry of '*Sans dot!*' which scared suitors. The '*Sans dot*' did not frighten Sauviat away; he was not averse to receiving the bride without a portion; in the first place, a would-be bridegroom of fifty ought not to raise difficulties; and, in the second, his wife saved him the expense of a servant. He added nothing to the furniture of his room. On his wedding day it contained a four-post bedstead hung with green serge curtains and a valance with a scalloped edge; a dresser, a chest of drawers, four easy-chairs, a table, and a looking-glass, all bought at different times and from different places; and till he left the old house for good, the list remained the same. On the upper shelves of the dresser stood sundry pewter plates and dishes, no two of them alike. After this description of the bedroom, the kitchen may be left to the reader's imagination.

Neither husband nor wife could read, a slight defect of education which did not prevent them from reckoning money to admiration, nor from carrying on one of the most prosperous of all trades, for Sauviat never bought anything unless he felt sure of making a hundred per cent. on the transaction, and dispensed with book-keeping and counting-house by carrying on a ready-money business. He possessed, moreover, a faculty of memory so perfect, that an article might remain for five years in his shop, and at the end of the time both he and his wife could recollect the price they gave for it to a farthing, together with the added interest for every year since the outlay.

Sauviat's wife, when she was not busy about the house, always sat on a rickety wooden chair in her shop door beside the pillar, knitting, and watching the passers-by, keeping an eye on the old iron, and selling, weighing, and delivering it herself if Sauviat was out on one of his journeys. At daybreak you might hear the dealer in old iron taking down the shutters, the dog was let loose into the street, and very soon Sauviat's wife came down to

help her husband to arrange their wares. Against the low wall of the shop in the Rue de la Cité and the Rue de la Vieille-Poste, they propped their heterogeneous collection of broken gun barrels, cart springs, and harness bells,—all the gimcracks, in short, which served as a trade sign and gave a sufficiently poverty-stricken look to a shop which in reality often contained twenty thousand francs worth of lead, steel, and bell metal. The retired hawker and his wife never spoke of their money; they hid it as a malefactor conceals a crime, and for a long while were suspected of clipping gold louis and silver crowns.

When old Champagnac died, the Sauviats made no inventory. They searched every corner and cranny of the old man's house with the quickness of rats, stripped it bare as a corpse, and sold the tinware themselves in their own shop. Once a year, when December came round, Sauviat would go to Paris, travelling in a public conveyance; from which premises, observers in the quarter concluded that the dealer in old iron saw to his investments in Paris himself, so that he might keep the amount of his money a secret. It came out in after years that as a lad Sauviat had known one of the most celebrated metal merchants in Paris, a fellow-countryman from Auvergne, and that Sauviat's savings were invested with the prosperous firm of Brézac, the corner-stone of the famous association of the Black Band, which was started, as has been said, by Sauviat's advice, and in which he held shares.

Sauviat was short and stout. He had a weary-looking face and an honest expression, which attracted customers, and was of no little use to him in the matter of sales. The dryness of his affirmations, and the perfect indifference of his manner, aided his pretensions. It was not easy to guess the colour of the skin beneath the black metallic grime which covered his curly hair and countenance seamed with the smallpox. His forehead was not

without a certain nobility; indeed, he resembled the traditional type chosen by painters for Saint Peter, the man of the people among the apostles, the roughest among their number, and likewise the shrewdest; Sauviat had the hands of an indefatigable worker, rifted by ineffaceable cracks, square-shaped, and coarse and large. The muscular framework of his chest seemed indestructible. All through his life he dressed like a hawker, wearing the thick iron-bound shoes, the blue stockings which his wife knitted for him, the leather gaiters, breeches of bottle-green velveteen, a coat with short skirts of the same material, and a flapped waistcoat, where the copper key of a silver watch dangled from an iron chain, worn by constant friction, till it shone like polished steel. Round his neck he wore a cotton handkerchief, frayed by the constant rubbing of his beard. On Sundays and holidays he appeared in a maroon overcoat so carefully kept that he bought a new one but twice in a score of years.

As for their manner of living, the convicts in the hulks might be said to fare sumptuously in comparison; it was a day of high festival indeed when they ate meat. Before La Sauviat could bring herself to part with the money needed for their daily sustenance, she rummaged through the two pockets under her skirt, and never drew forth coin that was not clipped or light weight, eyeing the crowns of six livres and fifty sous pieces dolorously before she changed one of them. The Sauviats contented themselves, for the most part, with herrings, dried peas, cheese, hard-boiled eggs and salad, and vegetables dressed in the cheapest way. They lived from hand to mouth, laying in nothing except a bundle of garlic now and again, or a rope of onions, which could not spoil, and cost them a mere trifle. As for firewood, La Sauviat bought the few sticks which they required in winter of the faggot-sellers day by day. By seven o'clock in winter and nine in summer the shutters were fastened, the

master and mistress in bed, and their huge dog, who picked up his living in the kitchens of the quarter, on guard in the shop; Mother Sauviat did not spend three francs a year on candles.

A joy came into their sober hard-working lives; it was a joy that came in the natural order of things, and caused the only outlay which they had been known to make. In May 1802, La Sauviat bore a daughter. No one was called in to her assistance, and five days later she was stirring about her house again. She nursed her child herself, sitting on the chair in the doorway, selling her wares as usual, with the baby at her breast. Her milk cost nothing, so for two years she suckled the little one, who was none the worse for it, for little Véronique grew to be the prettiest child in the lower town, so pretty indeed, that passers-by would stop to look at her. The neighbours saw in old Sauviat traces of a tenderness of which they had believed him incapable. While the wife made the dinner ready he used to rock the little one, in his arms, crooning the refrain of some Auvergnat song; and the workmen as they passed sometimes saw him sitting motionless, gazing at little Véronique asleep on her mother's knee. His gruff voice grew gentle for the child; he would wipe his hands on his trousers before taking her up. When Véronique was learning to walk, her father squatted on his heels four paces away, holding out his arms to her, gleeful smiles puckering the deep wrinkles on the harsh, stern face of bronze; it seemed as if the man of iron, brass, and lead had once more become flesh and blood. As he stood leaning against the pillar motionless as a statue, he would start at a cry from Véronique, and spring over the iron to find her, for she spent her childhood in playing about among the metallic spoils of old châteaux heaped up in the recesses of the shop, and never hurt herself; and if she played in the street or with the neighbours' children, she was never allowed out of her mother's sight.

It is worth while to add that the Sauviats were eminently devout. Even when the Revolution was at its height Sauviat kept Sundays and holidays punctually. Twice in those days he had all but lost his head for going to hear mass said by a priest who had not taken the oath to the Republic. He found himself in prison at last, justly accused of conniving at the escape of a bishop whose life he had saved; but luckily for the hawker, steel files and iron bars were old acquaintances of his, and he made his escape. Whereupon the Court finding that he failed to put in an appearance, gave judgment by default, and condemned him to death; and it may be added, that as he never returned to clear himself, he finally died under sentence of death. In his religious sentiments his wife shared; the parsimonious rule of the household was only relaxed in the name of religion. Punctually the two paid their quota for sacramental bread, and gave money for charity. If the curate of Saint-Étienne came to ask for alms, Sauviat or his wife gave without fuss or hesitation what they believed to be their due share towards the funds of the parish. The broken Virgin on their pillar was decked with sprays of box when Easter came round; and so long as there were flowers, the passers-by saw that the blue glass bouquet-holders were never empty, and this especially after Véronique's birth. Whenever there was a processsion the Sauviats never failed to drape their house with hangings and garlands, and contributed to the erection and adornment of the altar—the pride of their street.

So Véronique was brought up in the Christian faith. As soon as she was seven years old, she was educated by a grey Sister, an Auvergnate, to whom the Sauviats had rendered some little service; for both of them were sufficiently obliging so long as their time or their substance was not in question, and helpful after the manner of the poor, who lend themselves with a certain heartiness. It was the Franciscan Sister who taught Véronique to

read and write; she instructed her pupil in the History of the People of God, in the Catechism and the Old and New Testaments, and, to a certain small extent, in the rules of arithmetic. That was all. The good Sister thought that it would be enough, but even this was too much.

Véronique at nine years of age astonished the quarter by her beauty. Every one admired a face which might one day be worthy of the pencil of some impassioned seeker after an ideal type. 'The little Virgin,' as they called her, gave promise of being graceful of form and fair of face; the thick, bright hair which set off the delicate outlines of her features completed her resemblance to the Madonna. Those who have seen the divine child-virgin in Titian's great picture of the Presentation in the Temple may know what Véronique was like in these years; she had the same frank innocence of expression, the same look as of a wondering seraph in her eyes, the same noble simplicity, the same queenly bearing.

Two years later, Véronique fell ill of the smallpox, and would have died of it but for Sister Martha, who nursed her. During those two months, while her life was in danger, the quarter learned how tenderly the Sauviats loved their daughter. Sauviat attended no sales, and went nowhere. All day long he stayed in the shop, or went restlessly up and down the stairs, and he and his wife sat up night after night with the child. So deep was his dumb grief, that no one dared to speak to him; the neighbours watched him pityingly, and asked for news of Véronique of no one but Sister Martha. The days came when the child's life hung by a thread, and neighbours and passers-by saw, for the first and only time in Sauviat's life, the slow tears rising under his eyelids and rolling down his hollow cheeks. He never wiped them away. For hours he sat like one stupefied, not daring to go upstairs to the sickroom, staring before him with unseeing

eyes; he might have been robbed, and he would not have noticed it.

Véronique's life was saved, not so her beauty. A uniform tint, in which red and brown were evenly blended, overspread her face; the disease left countless little scars which coarsened the surface of the skin, and wrought havoc with the delicate underlying tissues. Nor had her forehead escaped the ravages of the scourge; it was brown, and covered with dints like the marks of hammer strokes. No combination is more discordant than a muddy-brown complexion and fair hair; the pre-established harmony of colouring is broken. Deep irregular seams in the surface had spoiled the purity of her features and the delicacy of the outlines of her face; the Grecian profile, the subtle curves of a chin finely moulded as white porcelain, were scarcely discernible beneath the coarsened skin; the disease had only spared what it was powerless to injure—the teeth and eyes. But Véronique did not lose her grace and beauty of form, the full rounded curves of her figure, nor the slenderness of her waist. At fifteen she was a graceful girl, and (for the comfort of the Sauviats) a good girl and devout, hard-working, industrious, always at home.

After her convalescence and first communion, her father and mother arranged for her the two rooms on the second floor. Some glimmering notion of what is meant by comfort passed through old Sauviat's mind; hard fare might do for him and his wife, but now a dim idea of making compensation for a loss which his daughter had not felt as yet, crossed his brain. Véronique had lost the beauty of which these two had been so proud, and thenceforward became the dearer to them, and the more precious in their eyes.

So one day Sauviat came in, carrying a carpet, a chance purchase, on his back, and this he himself nailed down on the floor of Véronique's room. He went to a sale of furniture at a château, and secured for her the red

damask-curtained bed of some great lady, and hangings and chairs and easy-chairs covered with the same stuff. Gradually he furnished his daughter's rooms with second-hand purchases, in complete ignorance of the real value of the things. He set pots of mignonette on the window-sill, and brought back flowers for her from his wanderings; sometimes it was a rosebush, sometimes a tree-carnation, and plants of all kinds, doubtless given to him by gardeners and innkeepers. If Véronique had known enough of other people to draw comparisons, and to understand their manners of life and the characters and the ignorance of her parents, she would have known how great the affection was which showed itself in these little things; but the girl gave her father and mother the love that springs from an exquisite nature—an instinctive and unreasoning love.

Véronique must have the finest linen which her mother could buy, and La Sauviat allowed her daughter to choose her own dresses. Both father and mother were pleased with her moderation; Véronique had no ruinous tastes. A blue silk gown for holiday wear, a winter dress of coarse merino for working days, and a striped cotton gown in summer; with these she was content.

On Sunday she went to mass with her father and mother, and walked with them after vespers along the banks of the Vienne or in the neighbourhood of the town. All through the week she stayed in the house, busy over the tapestry-work, which was sold for the benefit of the poor, or the plain sewing for the hospital—no life could be more simple, more innocent, more exemplary than hers. She had other occupations beside her sewing; she read to herself, but only such books as the curate of Saint-Étienne lent to her. (Sister Martha had introduced the priest to the Sauviat family.)

For Véronique all the laws of the household economy were set aside. Her mother delighted to cook dainty

fare for her, and made separate dishes for her daughter. Father and mother might continue, as before, to eat the walnuts and the hard bread, the herrings, and the dried peas fried with a little salt butter; but for Véronique, nothing was fresh enough nor good enough.

'Véronique must be a great expense to you,' remarked the hatter who lived opposite. He estimated old Sauviat's fortune at a hundred thousand francs, and had thoughts of Véronique for his son.

'Yes, neighbour; yes, neighbour; yes,' old Sauviat answered, 'she might ask me for ten crowns, and I should let her have them, I should. She has everything she wants, but she never asks for anything. She is as good and gentle as a lamb!'

And, in fact, Véronique did not know the price of anything; she had no wants; she never saw a piece of gold till the day of her marriage, and had no money of her own; her mother bought and gave to her all that she wished, and even for a beggar she drew upon her mother's pockets.

'Then she doesn't cost you much,' commented the hatter.

'That is what you think, is it?' retorted Sauviat. 'You wouldn't do it on less than forty crowns a year. You should see her room! There is a hundred crowns' worth of furniture in it; but when you have only one girl, you can indulge yourself; and, after all, what little we have will all be hers some day.'

'*Little?* You must be rich, Father Sauviat. These forty years you have been in a line of business where there are no losses.'

'Oh, they shouldn't cut my ears off for a matter of twelve hundred francs,' said the dealer in old iron.

From the day when Véronique lost the delicate beauty, which every one had admired in her childish face, old Sauviat had worked twice as hard as before. His business revived again, and prospered so well, that he went to

Paris not once, but several times a year. People guessed his motives. If his girl had gone off in looks, he would make up for it in money, to use his own language.

When Véronique was about fifteen another change was wrought in the household ways. The father and mother went up to their daughter's room of an evening, and listened while she read aloud to them from the *Lives of the Saints*, or the *Lettres édifiantes*, or from some other book lent by the curate of Saint-Étienne. The lamp was set behind a glass globe full of water, and Mother Sauviat knitted industriously, thinking in this way to pay for the oil. The neighbours opposite could look into the room and see the two old people sitting there, motionless as two carved Chinese figures, listening intently, admiring their daughter with all the power of an intelligence that was dim enough save in matters of business or religion. Doubtless there have been girls as pure as Véronique—there have been none purer nor more modest. Her confession surely filled the angels with wonder, and gladdened the Virgin in Heaven. She was now sixteen years old, and perfectly developed; you beheld in her the woman she would be. She was of medium height, neither the father nor the mother was tall; but the most striking thing about her figure was its lissome grace, the sinuous, gracious curves which Nature herself traces so finely, which the artist strives so painfully to render; the soft contours that reveal themselves to practised eyes, for in spite of folds of linen and thickness of stuff, the dress is always moulded and informed by the body. Simple, natural, and sincere, Véronique set this physical beauty in relief by her unaffected freedom of movement. She produced her 'full and entire effect,' if it is permissible to make use of the forcible legal phrase. She had the full-fleshed arms of an Auvergnate, the red, plump hands of a buxom inn-servant, and feet strongly made, but shapely, and in proportion to her height.

Sometimes there was wrought in her an exquisite mysterious change; suddenly it was revealed that in this frame dwelt a woman hidden from all eyes but Love's. Perhaps it was this transfiguration which awakened an admiration of her beauty in the father and mother, who astonished the neighbours by speaking of it as something divine. The first to see it were the clergy of the cathedral and the communicants at the table of the Lord. When Véronique's face was lighted up by impassioned feeling—and the mystical ecstasy which filled her at such times is one of the strongest emotions in the life of so innocent a girl—it seemed as if a bright inner radiance effaced the traces of the smallpox, and the pure, bright face appeared once more in the first beauty of childhood. Scarcely obscured by the thin veil of tissues coarsened by the disease, her face shone like some flower in dim places under the sea, when the sunlight strikes down and invests it with a mysterious glory. For a few brief moments Véronique was transfigured, the Little Virgin appeared and disappeared like a vision from Heaven. The pupils of her eyes, which possessed in a high degree the power of contracting, seemed at such seasons to dilate and overspread the blue of the iris, which diminished till it became nothing more than a slender ring; the change in the eyes, which thus grew piercing as the eagle's, completing the wonderful change in the face. Was it a storm of repressed and passionate longing, was it some power which had its source in the depths of her nature, which made those eyes dilate in broad daylight as other eyes widen in shadow, darkening their heavenly blue? Whatever the cause, it was impossible to look upon Véronique with indifference as she returned to her place after having been made one with God; all present beheld her in the radiance of her early beauty; at such times she would have eclipsed the fairest women in her loveliness. What a charm for a jealous lover in that veil of flesh which should hide his love

from all other eyes; a veil which the hand of Love could raise to let fall again upon the rapture of wedded bliss. Véronique's lips, faultless in their curves, seemed to have been painted scarlet, so richly were they coloured by the pure glow of the blood. Her chin and the lower part of her face were a little full, in the sense that painters give to the word, and this heaviness of contour is, by the unalterable laws of physiognomy, a certain sign of a capacity for almost morbid violence of passion. Her finely moulded but almost imperious brow was crowned by a glorious diadem of thick abundant hair; the gold had deepened to a chestnut tint.

From her sixteenth year till the day of her marriage Véronique's demeanour was thoughtful and full of melancholy. In an existence so lonely she fell, as solitary souls are wont, to watching the grand spectacle of the life within, the progress of her thoughts, the ever-changing phantasmagoria of mental visions, the yearnings kindled by her pure life. Those who passed along the Rue de la Cité on sunny days had only to look up to see the Sauviats' girl sitting at her window with a bit of sewing or embroidery in her hand, drawing the needle in and out with a somewhat dreamy air. Her head stood out in sharp contrast against its background among the flowers which gave a touch of poetry to the prosaic, cracked, brown window-sill, and the small leaded panes of her casement. At times a reflected glow from the red damask curtains added to the effect of the face so brightly coloured already; it looked like some rosy-red flower above the little skyey garden, which she tended so carefully upon the ledge. So the quaint old house contained something still more quaint—a portrait of a young girl, worthy of Mieris, Van Ostade, Terburg, or Gerard Dow, framed in one of the old, worn, and blackened, and almost ruinous windows which Dutch artists loved to paint. If a stranger happened to glance up at the second floor, and stand agape with wonder at

its construction, old Sauviat below would thrust out his head till he could look up the face of the overhanging story. He was sure to see Véronique there at the window. Then he would go in again, rubbing his hands, and say to his wife in the patois of Auvergne—

'Hullo, old woman, there is some one admiring your daughter!'

In 1820 an event occurred in Véronique's simple and uneventful life. It was a little thing, which would have exercised no influence upon another girl, but destined to effect a fatal influence on Véronique's future life. On the day of a suppressed Church festival, a working day for the rest of the town, the Sauviats shut their shop and went first to mass and then for a walk. On their way into the country they passed by a bookseller's shop, and among the books displayed outside Véronique saw one called *Paul et Virginie*. The fancy took her to buy it for the sake of the engraving; her father paid five francs for the fatal volume, and slipped it into the vast pocket of his overcoat.

'Wouldn't it be better to show it to M. le Vicaire?' asked the mother; for her any printed book was something of an abracadabra, which might or might not be for evil.

'Yes, I thought I would,' Véronique answered simply.

She spent that night in reading the book, one of the most touching romances in the French language. The love scenes, half-biblical, and worthy of the early ages of the world, wrought havoc in Véronique's heart. A hand, whether diabolical or divine, had raised for her the veil which hitherto had covered nature. On the morrow the Little Virgin within the beautiful girl thought her flowers fairer than on the evening of the day before; she understood their symbolical language, she gazed up at the blue sky with exaltation, causeless tears rose to her eyes.

In every woman's life there comes a moment when she understands her destiny, or her organisation, hitherto mute, speaks with authority. It is not always a man singled out by an involuntary and stolen glance who reveals the possession of a sixth sense, hitherto dormant; more frequently it is some sight that comes with the force of a surprise, a landscape, a page of a book, some day of high pomp, some ceremony of the Church; the scent of growing flowers, the delicate brightness of a misty morning, the intimate sweetness of divine music, —and something suddenly stirs in body or soul. For the lonely child, a prisoner in the dark house, brought up by parents almost as rough and simple as peasants; for the girl who had never heard an improper word, whose innocent mind had never received the slightest taint of evil; for the angelic pupil of Sister Martha and of the good curate of Saint-Étienne, the revelation of love came through a charming book from the hand of genius. No peril would have lurked in it for any other, but for her an obscene work would have been less dangerous. Corruption is relative. There are lofty and virginal natures which a single thought suffices to corrupt, a thought which works the more ruin because the necessity of combating it is not foreseen.

The next day Véronique showed her book to the good priest, who approved the purchase of a work so widely known for its childlike innocence and purity. But the heat of the tropics, the beauty of the land described in *Paul et Virginie*, the almost childish innocence of a love scarcely of this earth, had wrought upon Véronique's imagination. She was captivated by the noble and sweet personality of the author, and carried away towards the cult of the Ideal, that fatal religion. She dreamed of a lover, a young man like Paul, and brooded over soft imaginings of that life of lovers in some fragrant island. Below Limoges, and almost opposite the Faubourg Saint-Martial, there is a little island in the Vienne;

this, in her childish fancy, Véronique called the Isle of France, and filled with the fantastic creations of a young girl's dreams, vague shadows endowed with the dreamer's own perfections.

She sat more than ever in the window in those days, and watched the workmen as they came and went. Her parents' humble position forbade her to think of any one but an artisan ; yet, accustomed as she doubtless was to the idea of becoming a working man's wife, she was conscious of an instinctive refinement which shrank from anything rough or coarse. So she began to weave for herself a romance such as most girls weave in their secret hearts for themselves alone. With the enthusiasm which might be expected of a refined and girlish imagination, she seized on the attractive idea of ennobling one of these working-men, of raising him to the level of her dreams. She made (who knows ?) a Paul of some young man whose face she saw in the street, simply that she might attach her wild fancies to some human creature, as the overcharged atmosphere of a winter day deposits dew on the branches of a tree by the wayside, for the frost to transform into magical crystals. How should she escape a fall into the depths ? for if she often seemed to return to earth from far-off heights with a reflected glory about her brows, yet oftener she appeared to bring with her flowers gathered on the brink of a torrent-stream which she had followed down into the abyss. On warm evenings she asked her old father to walk out with her, and never lost an opportunity of a stroll by the Vienne. She went into ecstasy at every step over the beauty of the sky and land, over the red glories of the sunset, or the joyous freshness of dewy mornings, and the sense of these things, the poetry of nature, passed into her soul.

She curled and waved the hair which she used to wear in simple plaits about her head ; she thought more about her dress. The young, wild vine which had grown as

its nature prompted about the old elm-tree was transplanted and trimmed and pruned, and grew upon a dainty green trellis.

One evening in December 1822, when Sauviat (now seventy years old) had returned from a journey to Paris, the curate dropped in, and after a few commonplaces—

'You must think of marrying your daughter, Sauviat,' said the priest. 'At your age you should no longer delay the fulfilment of an important duty.'

'Why, has Véronique a mind to be married?' asked the amazed old man.

'As you please, father,' the girl answered, lowering her eyes.

'We will marry her,' cried portly Mother Sauviat, smiling as she spoke.

'Why didn't you say something about this before I left home, mother?' Sauviat asked. 'I shall have to go back to Paris again.'

In Jerome-Baptiste Sauviat's eyes, plenty of money appeared to be synonymous with happiness. He had always regarded love and marriage in their purely physical and practical aspects; marriage was a means of transmitting his property (he being no more) to another self; so he vowed that Véronique should marry a well-to-do man. Indeed, for a long while past this had become a fixed idea with him. His neighbour the hatter, who was retiring from business, and had an income of two thousand livres a year, had already asked for Véronique for his son and successor (for Véronique was spoken of in the quarter as a good girl of exemplary life), and had been politely refused. Sauviat had not so much as mentioned this to Véronique.

The curate was Véronique's director, and a great man in the Sauviats' eyes; so the day after he had spoken of Veronique's marriage as a necessity, old Sauviat shaved himself, put on his Sunday clothes, and went out. He

said not a word to his wife and daughter, but the women knew that the old man had gone out to find a son-in-law. Sauviat went to M. Graslin.

M. Graslin, a rich banker of Limoges, had left his native Auvergne like Sauviat himself, without a sou in his pocket. He had begun life as a porter in a banker's service, and from that position had made his way, like many another capitalist, partly by thrift, partly by sheer luck. A cashier at five-and-twenty, and at five-and-thirty a partner in the firm of Perret & Grossetête, he at last bought out the original partners, and became sole owner of the bank. His two colleagues went to live in the country, leaving their capital in his hands at a low rate of interest. Pierre Graslin, at the age of forty-seven, was believed to possess six hundred thousand francs at the least. His reputation for riches had recently increased, and the whole department had applauded his free-handedness when he built a house for himself in the new quarter of the Place des Arbres, which adds not a little to the appearance of Limoges. It was a handsome house, on the plan of alignment, with a façade like a neighbouring public building; but though the mansion had been finished for six months, Pierre Graslin hesitated to furnish it. His house had cost him so dear, that at the thought of living in it he drew back. Self-love, it may be, had enticed him to exceed the limits he had prudently observed all his life long; he thought, moreover, with the plain sense of a man of business, that it was only right that the inside of his house should be in keeping with the programme adopted with the façade. The plate and furniture and accessories needed for the housekeeping in such a mansion would cost more, according to his computations, than the actual outlay on the building. So, in spite of the town gossip, the broad grins of commercial circles, and the charitable surmises of his neighbours, Pierre Graslin stayed where he was on the damp and dirty ground-floor dwelling in the Rue

Montantmanigne, where his fortune had been made, and the great house stood empty. People might talk, but Graslin was happy in the approbation of his two old sleeping partners, who praised him for displaying such uncommon strength of mind.

Such a fortune and such a life as Graslin's is sure to excite plentiful covetousness in a country town. During the past ten years more than one proposition of marriage had been skilfully insinuated. But the estate of a bachelor was eminently suited to a man who worked from morning to night, overwhelmed with business, and wearied by his daily round, a man as keen after money as a sportsman after game; so Graslin had fallen into none of the snares set for him by ambitious mothers who coveted a brilliant position for their daughters. Graslin, the Sauviat of a somewhat higher social sphere, did not spend two francs a day upon himself, and dressed no better than his second clerk. His whole staff consisted of a couple of clerks and an office-boy, though he went through an amount of business which might fairly be called immense, so multitudinous were its ramifications. One of the clerks saw to the correspondence, the other kept the books; and for the rest Pierre Graslin was both the soul and body of his business. He chose his clerks from his family circle; they were of his own stamp, trustworthy, intelligent, and accustomed to work. As for the office-boy, he led the life of a dray horse.

Graslin rose all the year round before five in the morning, and was never in bed till eleven o'clock at night. His charwoman, an old Auvergnate, who came in to do the housework and to cook his meals, had strict orders never to exceed the sum of three francs for the total daily expense of the household. The brown earthenware, the strong coarse tablecloths and sheets, were in keeping with the manners and customs of an establishment in which the porter was the man of all work, and the clerks made their own beds. The

blackened deal tables, the ragged straw-bottomed chairs with the holes through the centre, the pigeon-hole writing-desks and ramshackle bedsteads, in fact, all the furniture of the counting-house and the three rooms above it, would not have fetched three thousand francs, even if the safe had been included, a colossal solid iron structure built into the wall itself, before which the porter nightly slept with a couple of dogs at his feet. It had been a legacy from the old firm to the present one.

Graslin was not often seen in society, where a great deal was heard about him. He dined with the Receiver-General (a business connection) two or three times a year, and he had been known to take a meal at the prefecture; for, to his own intense disgust, he had been nominated a member of the general council of the department. 'He wasted his time there,' he said. Occasionally, when he had concluded a bargain with a business acquaintance, he was detained to lunch or dinner; and lastly, he was sometimes compelled to call upon his old patrons who spent the winter in Limoges. So slight was the hold which social relations had upon him, that at twenty-five years of age Graslin had not so much as offered a glass of water to any creature.

People used to say, 'That is M. Graslin!' when he passed along the street, which is to say, 'There is a man who came to Limoges without a farthing, and has made an immense amount of money.' The Auvergnat banker became a kind of pattern and example held up by fathers of families to their offspring—and an epigram which more than one wife cast in her husband's teeth. It is easy to imagine the motives which induced this principal pivot in the financial machinery of Limoges to repel the matrimonial advances so perseveringly made to him. The daughters of Messieurs Perret and Grossetête had been married before Graslin was in a position to ask for them; but as each of these ladies had daughters in the schoolroom, people left Graslin alone at last, taking

it for granted that either old Perret or Grossetête the shrewd had arranged a match to be carried out some future day, when Graslin should be bridegroom to one of the granddaughters.

Sauviat had watched his fellow countryman's rise and progress more closely than any one. He had known Graslin ever since he came to Limoges, but their relative positions had changed so much (in appearance at any rate) that the friendship became an acquaintance, renewed only at long intervals. Still, in his quality of fellow countryman, Graslin was never above having a chat with Sauviat in the Auvergne dialect if the two happened to meet, and in their own language they dropped the formal 'you' for the more familiar 'thee' and 'thou.'

In 1823, when the youngest of the brothers Grossetête, the Receiver-General of Bourges, married his daughter to the youngest son of the Comte de Fontaine, Sauviat saw that the Grossetêtes had no mind to take Graslin into their family.

After a conference with the banker, old Sauviat returned in high glee to dine in his daughter's room.

'Véronique will be Madame Graslin,' he told the two women.

'*Madame Graslin!*' cried Mother Sauviat, in amazement.

'Is it possible?' asked Véronique. She did not know Graslin by sight, but the name produced much such an effect on her imagination as the word Rothschild upon a Parisian shop-girl.

'Yes. It is settled,' old Sauviat continued solemnly. 'Graslin will furnish his house very grandly; he will have the finest carriage from Paris that money can buy for our daughter, and the best pair of horses in Limousin. He will buy an estate worth five hundred thousand francs for her, and settle the house on her besides. In short, Véronique will be the first lady in Limoges, and

the richest in the department, and can do just as she likes with Graslin.'

Véronique's boundless affection for her father and mother, her bringing-up, her religious training, her utter ignorance, prevented her from raising a single objection; it did not so much as occur to her that she had been disposed of without her own consent. The next day Sauviat set out for Paris, and was away for about a week.

Pierre Graslin, as you may imagine, was no great talker; he went straight to the point, and acted promptly. A thing determined upon was a thing done at once. So in February 1822 a strange piece of news surprised Limoges like a sudden thunder-clap. Graslin's great house was being handsomely furnished. Heavy waggon loads from Paris arrived daily to be unpacked in the courtyard. Rumours flew about the town concerning the good taste displayed in the beautiful furniture, modern and antique. A magnificent service of plate came down from Odiot's by the mail; and (actually) three carriages!—a calèche, a brougham, and a cabriolet arrived carefully packed in straw as if they had been jewels.

'M. Graslin is going to be married!' The words passed from mouth to mouth, and in the course of a single evening the news filtered through the drawing-rooms of the Limousin aristocracy to the back parlours and shops in the suburbs, till all Limoges in fact had heard it. But whom was he going to marry? Nobody could answer the question. There was a mystery in Limoges.

As soon as Sauviat came back from Paris, Graslin made his first nocturnal visit, at half-past nine o'clock. Véronique knew that he was coming. She wore her blue silk gown, cut square at the throat, and a wide collar of cambric with a deep hem. Her hair she had simply parted into two bandeaux, waved and gathered,

into a Grecian knot at the back of her head. She was sitting in a tapestry-covered chair near the fireside, where her mother occupied a great armchair with a carved back and crimson velvet cushions, a bit of salvage from some ruined château. A blazing fire burned on the hearth. Upon the mantel-shelf, on either side of an old clock (whose value the Sauviats certainly did not know), stood two old-fashioned sconces; six wax-candles in the sockets among the brazen vine-stems shed their light on the brown chamber, and on Véronique in her bloom. The old mother had put on her best dress.

In the midst of the silence that reigned in the streets at that silent hour, with the dimly lit staircase as a background, Graslin appeared for the first time before Véronique—the shy childish girl whose head was still full of sweet fancies of love derived from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's book. Graslin was short and thin. His thick black hair stood up straight on his forehead like bristles in a brush, in startling contrast with a face red as a drunkard's, and covered with suppurating or bleeding pustules. The eruption was neither scrofula nor leprosy, it was simply a result of an overheated condition of the blood; unflagging toil, anxiety, fanatical application to business, late hours, a life steady and sober to the point of abstemiousness, had induced a complaint which seemed to be related to both diseases. In spite of partners, clerks, and doctors, the banker had never brought himself to submit to a regimen which might have alleviated the symptoms or cured an evil, trifling at first, which was daily aggravated by neglect as time went on. He wished to be rid of it, and sometimes for a few days would take the baths and swallow the doses prescribed; but the round of business carried him away, and he forgot to take care of himself. Now and again he would talk of going away for a short holiday, and trying the waters somewhere or other for a cure, but where is the man in hot pursuit of millions who has been known to stop? In

this flushed countenance gleamed two grey eyes, the iris speckled with brown dots and streaked with fine green threads radiating from the pupil—two covetous eyes, piercing eyes that went to the depths of the heart, implacable eyes in which you read resolution and integrity and business faculty. A snub nose, thick blubber lips, a prominent rounded forehead, grinning cheek-bones, coarse ears corroded by the sour humours of the blood—altogether Graslin looked like an antique satyr—a satyr tricked out in a great coat, a black satin waistcoat, and a white neckcloth knotted about his neck. The strong muscular shoulders, which had once carried heavy burdens, stooped somewhat already ; the thin legs, which seemed to be imperfectly jointed with the short thighs, trembled beneath the weight of that over-developed torso. The bony fingers covered with hair were like claws, as is often the case with those who tell gold all day long. Two parallel lines furrowed the face from the cheek-bones to the mouth—an unerring sign that here was a man whose whole soul was taken up with material interests ; while the eyebrows sloped up towards the temples in a manner which indicated a habit of swift decision. Grim and hard though the mouth looked, there was something there that suggested an underlying kindliness, real good-heartedness, not called forth in a life of money-getting, and choked, it may be, by cares of this world, but which might revive at contact with a woman.

At sight of this apparition, something clutched cruelly at Véronique's heart. Everything grew dark before her eyes. She thought she cried out, but in reality she sat still, mute, staring with fixed eyes.

'Véronique,' said old Sauviat, 'this is M. Graslin.'

Véronique rose to her feet and bowed, then she sank down into her chair again, and her eyes sought her mother. But La Sauviat was smiling at the millionaire, looking so happy, so very happy, that the poor child

gathered courage to hide her violent feeling of repulsion and the shock she had received. In the midst of the conversation which followed, something was said about Graslin's health. The banker looked naïvely at himself in the bevelled mirror framed in ebony.

'I am not handsome, Mademoiselle,' he said, and he explained that the redness of his face was due to his busy life, and told them how he had disobeyed his doctor's orders. He hoped that as soon as he had a woman to look after him and his household, a wife who would take more care of him than he took of himself, he should look quite a different man.

'As if anybody married a man for his looks, mate!' cried the dealer in old iron, slapping his fellow countryman on the thigh.

Graslin's explanation appealed to instinctive feelings which more or less fill every woman's heart. Véronique bethought herself of her own face, marred by a hideous disease, and in her Christian humility she thought better of her first impression. Just then some one whistled in the street outside, Graslin went down, followed by Sauviat, who felt uneasy. Both men soon returned. The porter had brought the first bouquet of flowers, which had been in readiness for the occasion. At the reappearance of the banker with this stack of exotic blossoms, which he offered to his future bride, Véronique's feelings were very different from those with which she had first seen Graslin himself. The room was filled with the sweet scent, for Véronique it was the realisation of her day-dreams of the tropics. She had never seen white camellias before, had never known the scent of the Alpine cytisus, the exquisite fragrance of the citronella, the jessamine of the Azores, the verbena and musk-rose, and their sweetness, like a melody in perfume, falling on her senses stirred a vague tenderness in her heart.

Graslin left Véronique under the spell of that emotion;

but almost nightly after Sauviat returned home, the banker waited till all Limoges was asleep, and then slunk along under the walls to the house where the dealer in old iron lived. He used to tap softly on the shutters, the dog did not bark, the old man came down and opened the door to his fellow countryman, and Graslin would spend a couple of hours in the brown room where Véronique sat, and Mother Sauviat would serve him up an Auvergnat supper. The uncouth lover never came without a bouquet for Véronique, rare flowers only to be procured in M. Grossetête's hothouse, M. Grossetête being the only person in Limoges in the secret of the marriage. The porter went after dark to fetch the bouquet, which old Grossetête always gathered himself.

During those two months, Graslin went about fifty times to the house, and never without some handsome present, rings, a gold watch, a chain, a dressing-case, or the like; amazing lavishness on his part, which, however, is easily explained.

Véronique would bring him almost the whole of her father's fortune—she would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. The old man kept for himself an income of eight thousand francs, an old investment in the Funds, made when he was in imminent danger or losing his head on the scaffold. In those days he had put sixty thousand francs in assignats (the half of his fortune) into Government stock. It was Brézac who had advised the investment, and dissuaded him afterwards when he thought of selling out; it was Brézac, too, who in the same emergency had been a faithful trustee for the rest of his fortune—the vast sum of seven hundred gold louis, with which Sauviat began to speculate as soon as he made good his escape from prison. In thirty years' time each of those gold louis had been transmuted into a bill for a thousand francs, thanks partly to the interest on the assignats, partly to the money which fell in at the time of Champagnac's death, partly

to trading gains in the business, and to the money standing at compound interest in Brézac's concern. Brézac had done honestly by Sauviat, as Auvergnat does by Auvergnat. And so whenever Sauviat went to take a look at the front of Graslin's great house—

'Véronique shall live in that palace!' he said to himself.

He knew that there was not another girl in Limousin who would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs paid down on her marriage day, beside two hundred and fifty thousand of expectations. Graslin, the son-in-law of his choice, must therefore inevitably marry Véronique. So every evening Véronique received a bouquet, which daily made her little sitting-room bright with flowers, a bouquet carefully kept out of sight of the neighbours. She admired the beautiful jewels, the rubies, pearls, and diamonds, the bracelets, dear to all daughters of Eve, and thought herself less ugly thus adorned. She saw her mother happy over this marriage, and she herself had no standard of comparison; she had no idea what marriage meant, no conception of its duties; and finally, she heard the curate of Saint-Étienne praising Graslin to her, in his solemn voice, telling her that this was an honourable man with whom she would lead an honourable life. So Véronique consented to receive M. Graslin's attentions. In a lonely and monotonous life like hers, let a single person present himself day by day, and before long that person will not be indifferent; for either an aversion, confirmed by a deeper knowledge, will turn to hate, and the visitor's presence will be intolerable; or custom stales (so to speak) the sight of physical defects, and then the mind begins to look for compensations. Curiosity busies itself with the face; from some cause or other the features light up, there is some fleeting gleam of beauty there; and at last the nature, hidden beneath the outward form, is discovered. In short, first impressions once overcome, the force with

which the one soul is attracted to the other is but so much the stronger, because the discovery of the true nature of the other is all its own. So love begins. Herein lies the secret of the passionate love which beautiful persons entertain for others who are not beautiful in appearance; affection, looking deeper than the outward form, sees the form no longer, but a soul, and thenceforward knows nothing else. Moreover, the beauty so necessary in a woman takes in a man such a strange character, that women's opinions differ as much on the subject of a man's good looks as men about the beauty of a woman.

After much meditation and many struggles with herself, Véronique allowed the banns to be published, and all Limoges rang with the incredible news. Nobody knew the secret—the bride's immense dowry. If that had been bruited abroad, Véronique might have chosen her husband, but perhaps even so would have been mistaken. It was a love-match on Graslin's side, people averred.

Upholsterers arrived from Paris to furnish the fine house. The banker was going to great expense over it, and nothing else was talked of in Limoges. People discussed the price of the chandeliers, the gilding of the drawing-room, the mythical subjects of the timepieces; and there were well-informed folk who could describe the flower-stands and the porcelain stoves, the luxurious novel contrivances. For instance, there was an aviary built above the ice-house in the garden of the Hôtel Graslin; all Limoges marvelled at the rare birds in it—the parroquets, and Chinese pheasants, and strange waterfowl, there was no one who had not seen them.

M. and Mme. Grossetête, old people much looked up to in Limoges, called several times upon the Sauviats, Graslin accompanying them. Mme. Grossetête, worthy woman, congratulated Véronique on the fortunate marriage she was to make; so the Church, the family, and the

world, together with every trifling circumstance, combined to bring this match about.

In the month of April, formal invitations were sent to all Graslin's circle of acquaintance. At eleven o'clock one fine sunny morning a calèche and a brougham, drawn by Limousin horses in English harness (old Grossetête had superintended his colleague's stable), arrived before the poor little shop where the dealer in old iron lived; and the excited quarter beheld the bridegroom's sometime partners and his two clerks. There was a prodigious sensation, the street was filled by the crowd eager to see the Sauviats' daughter. The most celebrated hairdresser in Limoges had set the bride's crown on her beautiful hair and arranged her veil of priceless Brussels lace; but Véronique's dress was of simple white muslin. A sufficiently imposing assembly of the most distinguished women of Limoges was present at the wedding in the cathedral; the Bishop himself, knowing the piety of the Sauviats, condescended to perform the marriage ceremony. People thought the bride a plain-looking girl. For the first time she entered her hôtel, and went from surprise to surprise. A state dinner preceded the ball, to which Graslin had invited almost all Limoges. The dinner given to the Bishop, the prefect, the president of the court of first instance, the public prosecutor, the mayor, the general, and to Graslin's sometime employers and their wives, was a triumph for the bride, who, like all simple and unaffected people, proved unexpectedly charming. None of the married people would dance, so that Véronique continued to do the honours of her house, and won the esteem and good graces of most of her new acquaintances; asking old Grossetête, who had taken a great kindness for her, for information about her guests, and so avoiding blunders. During the evening the two retired bankers spread the news of the fortune, immense for Limousin, which the parents of the bride had given her. At nine o'clock the dealer in old iron went home to bed,

leaving his wife to preside at the ceremony of undressing the bride. It was said in the town that Mme. Graslin was plain but well shaped.

Old Sauviat sold his business and his house in the town, and bought a cottage on the left bank of the Vienne, between Limoges and Le Cluzeau, and ten minutes' walk from the Faubourg Saint-Martial. Here he meant that he and his wife should end their days in peace. The two old people had rooms in Graslin's hôtel, and dined there once or twice a week with their daughter, whose walks usually took the direction of their house.

The retired dealer in old iron had nothing to do, and nearly died of leisure. Luckily for him, his son-in-law found him some occupation. In 1823 the banker found himself with a porcelain factory on his hands. He had lent large sums to the manufacturers, which they were unable to repay, so he had taken over the business to recoup himself. In this concern he invested more capital, and by this means, and by his extensive business connections, made of it one of the largest factories in Limoges; so that when he sold it in three years after he took it over, he made a large profit on the transaction. He made his father-in-law the manager of this factory, situated in the very same quarter of Saint-Martial where his house stood; and in spite of Sauviat's seventy-two years, he had done not a little in bringing about the prosperity of a business in which he grew quite young again. The plan had its advantages likewise for Graslin; but for old Sauviat, who threw himself heart and soul into the porcelain factory, he would have been perhaps obliged to take a clerk into partnership and lose part of the profits, which he now received in full; but as it was, he could look after his own affairs in the town, and feel his mind at ease as to the capital invested in the porcelain works.

In 1827 Sauviat met with an accident, which ended in his death. He was busy with the stocktaking, when he

stumbled over one of the crates in which the china was packed, grazing his leg slightly. He took no care of himself, and mortification set in; they talked of amputation, but he would not hear of losing his leg, and so he died. His widow made over about two hundred and fifty thousand francs, the amount of Sauviat's estate, to her daughter and son-in-law, Graslin undertaking to pay her two hundred francs a month, an amount amply sufficient for her needs. She persisted in living on without a servant in the little cottage; keeping her point with the obstinacy of old age, and in spite of her daughter's entreaties; but, on the other hand, she went almost every day to the Hôtel Graslin, and Véronique's walks, as heretofore, usually ended at her mother's house. There was a charming view from the windows of the river and the little island in the Vienne, which Véronique had loved in the old days, and called her Isle of France.

The story of the Sauviats has been anticipated partly to save interruption to the other story of the Graslins' household, partly because it serves to explain some of the reasons of the retired life which Véronique Graslin led. The old mother foresaw how much her child might one day be made to suffer through Graslin's avarice; for long she held out, and refused to give up the rest of her fortune, and only gave way when Véronique insisted upon it. Véronique was incapable of imagining circumstances in which a wife desires to have the control of her property, and acted upon a generous impulse; in this way she meant to thank Graslin for giving her back her liberty.

The unaccustomed splendours of Graslin's marriage had been totally at variance with his habits and nature. The great capitalist's ideas were very narrow. Véronique had had no opportunity of gauging the man with whom she must spend the rest of her life. During those fifty-five evening visits Graslin had shown but one side of his character—the man of business, the undaunted worker who planned and carried out large undertakings,

the capitalist who looked at public affairs with a view to their probable effect on the bank rate and opportunities of money-making. And, under the influence of his father-in-law's million, Graslin had behaved generously in those days, though even then his lavish expenditure was made to gain his own ends; he was drawn into expense in the springtide days of his marriage partly by the possession of the great house, which he called his 'Folly,' the house still called the Hôtel Graslin in Limoges.

As he had the horses, the calèche, and brougham, it was natural to make use of them to pay a round of visits on his marriage, and to go to the dinner-parties and dances given in honour of the bride by official dignitaries and wealthy houses. Acting on the impulses which carried him out of his ordinary sphere, Graslin was 'at home' to callers one day in the week, and sent to Paris for a cook. For about a year indeed he led the ordinary life of a man who has seventeen hundred thousand francs of his own, and can command a capital of three millions. He had come to be the most conspicuous personage in Limoges. During that year he generously allowed Mme. Graslin twenty-five twenty-franc pieces every month.

Véronique on her marriage had become a person of great interest to the rank and fashion of Limoges; she was a kind of godsend to the idle curiosity which finds such meagre sustenance in the provinces. Véronique, who had so suddenly made her appearance, was a phenomenon the more closely scrutinised on that account; but she always maintained the simple and unaffected attitude of an onlooker who watches manners and usages unknown to her, and seeks to conform to them. From the first she had been pronounced to have a good figure and a plain face, and now it was decided that she was good-natured, but stupid. She was learning so many things at once, she had so much to see and to hear, that her manner and talk gave some colour to this accusation. A sort of torpor, moreover, had stolen over her which

might well be mistaken for stupidity. Marriage, that 'difficult profession' of wifehood, as she called it, in which the Church, the Code, and her own mother bade her practise the most complete resignation and perfect obedience, under pain of breaking all laws human and divine, and bringing about irreparable evils; marriage had plunged her into a bewilderment which grew to the pitch of vertigo and delirium. While she sat silent and reserved, she heard her own thoughts as plainly as the voices about her. For her 'existence' had come to be extremely 'difficult,' to use the phrase of the dying Fontenelle, and ever more increasingly, till she grew frightened, she was afraid of herself. Nature recoiled from the orders of the soul; the body rebelled against the will. The poor snared creature wept on the bosom of the great Mother of the sorrowful and afflicted; she betook herself to the Church, she redoubled her fervour, she confided to her director the temptations which assailed her, she poured out her soul in prayer. Never at any time in her life did she fulfil her religious duties so zealously. The tempest of despair which filled her when she knew that she did not love her husband, flung her at the foot of the altar, where divine comforting voices spoke to her of patience. And she was patient and sweet, living in hope of the joys of motherhood.

'Did you see Mme. Graslin this morning?' the women asked among themselves. 'Marriage does not agree with her; she looked quite ghastly.'

'Yes; but would you have given a daughter of yours to a man like M. Graslin? Of course, if you marry such a monster, you suffer for it.'

As soon as Graslin was fairly married, all the mothers who had assiduously hunted him for the past ten years directed spiteful speeches at him. Véronique grew thin, and became plain in good earnest. Her eyes were heavy, her features coarsened, she looked shamefaced and embarrassed, and wore the dreary, chilling expression, so

repellent in bigoted devotees. A greyish tint overspread her complexion. She dragged herself languidly about during the first year of her marriage, usually the heyday of a woman's life. Before very long she sought for distraction in books, making use of her privilege as a married woman to read everything. She read Scott's novels, Byron's poems, the works of Schiller and Goethe, literature ancient and modern. She learned to ride, to dance, and draw. She made sepia drawings and sketches in water-colour, eager to learn every device which women use to while away the tedium of solitary hours; in short, that second education which a woman nearly always undertakes for a man's sake and with his guidance, she undertook alone and for herself.

In the loftiness of a nature frank and free, brought up, as it were, in the desert, but fortified by religion, there was a wild grandeur, cravings which found no satisfaction in the provincial society in which she moved. All the books described love; she looked up from her books on life, and found no traces of passion there. Love lay dormant in her heart like the germs which wait for the sun. Through a profound melancholy, caused by constant brooding over herself, she came by dim and winding ways back to the last bright dreams of her girlhood. She dwelt more than once on the old romantic imaginings, and became the heroine and the theatre of the drama. Once again she saw the island bathed in light, full of blossom and sweet scents, and all things grateful to her soul.

Not seldom her sad eyes wandered over her rooms with searching curiosity; the men she saw were all like Graslin; she watched them closely, and seemed to turn questioningly from them to their wives; but on the women's faces she saw no sign of her own secret trouble, and sadly and wearily she returned to her starting-point, uneasy about herself. Her highest thoughts met with a response in the books which she read of a morning, their wit pleased her; but in the evening she heard

nothing but commonplace thoughts, which no one attempted to disguise by giving a witty turn to them; the talk around her was vapid and empty, or ran upon gossip and local news, which had no interest for her. She wondered sometimes at the warmth of discussions in which there was no question of sentiment, for her the very core of life. She was often seen gazing before her with fixed, wide eyes, thinking, doubtless, of hours which she had spent, while still a girl ignorant of life, in the room where everything had been in keeping with her fancies, and now laid in ruins, like Véronique's own existence. She shrank in pain from the thought of being drawn into the eddy of petty cares and interests like the other women among whom she was forced to live; her ill-concealed disdain of the littleness of her lot, visible upon her lips and brow, was taken for upstart insolence.

Mme. Graslin saw the coolness upon all faces, and felt a certain bitter tone in the talk. She did not understand the reason, for as yet she had not made a friend sufficiently intimate to enlighten or counsel her. Injustice, under which small natures chafe, compels loftier souls to return within themselves, and induces in them a kind of humility. Véronique blamed herself, and tried to discover where the fault lay. She tried to be gracious, she was pronounced to be insincere; she redoubled her kindliness, and was said to be a hypocrite (her devotion giving colour to the slander); she was lavish of hospitality, and gave dinners and dances, and was accused of pride. All Mme. Graslin's efforts were unsuccessful. She was misjudged and repulsed by the petty querulous pride of provincial coteries, where susceptibilities are always upon the watch for offences; she went no more into society, and lived in the strictest retirement. The love in her heart turned to the Church. The great spirit in its feeble house of flesh saw in the manifold behests of Catholicism but so many stones set by the brink of the precipices of life, raised there by charitable

hands to prop human weakness by the way. So every least religious observance was practised with the most punctilious care.

Upon this, the Liberal party added Mme. Graslin's name to the list of bigots in the town. She was classed among the Ultras, and party spirit strengthened the various grudges which Véronique had innocently stored up against herself, with its periodical exacerbations. But as she had nothing to lose by this ostracism, she went no more into society, and betook herself to her books, with the infinite resources which they opened to her. She thought over her reading, she compared methods, she increased the amount of her actual knowledge and her power of acquiring it, and by so doing opened the gateways of her mind to curiosity.

It was at this period of close and persistent study, while religion supported her, that she gained a friend in M. Grossetête, an old man whose real ability had not grown so rusty in the course of a life in a country town but that contact with a keen intelligence could still draw a few sparks from it. The kind soul was deeply interested in Véronique, who, in return for the mild warmth of the mellowed affection which age alone can give, put forth all the treasures of her soul; for him the splendid powers cultivated in secret first blossomed forth.

A fragment of a letter written at this time to M. Grossetête will describe the mental condition of a woman who one day should give proof of a firm temper and lofty nature:—

'The flowers which you sent to me for the dance were very lovely, yet they suggested painful thoughts. The sight of that beauty, gathered by you to decorate a festival, and to fade on my breast and in my hair, made me think of other flowers born to die unseen in your woods, to shed sweet scent that no one breathes. Then I asked myself why I was dancing, why I had

decked myself with flowers, just as I ask God why I am here in the world. You see, my friend, that in everything there lurks a snare for the unhappy, just as the drollest trifles bring the sick back to their own sufferings. That is the worst of some troubles: they press upon us so constantly that they shape themselves into an idea which is ever present in our minds. An ever-present trouble ought surely to be a hallowed thought. You love flowers for their own sake; I love them as I love beautiful music. As I once told you, the secret of a host of things is hidden from me. . . . You, my old friend, for instance, have a passion for gardening. When you come back to town, teach me to share in this taste of yours; send me with a light footstep to my hothouse to feel the interest which you take in watching your plants grow. You seem to me to live and blossom with them, to take a delight in them, as in something of your own creation; to discover new colours, novel splendours, which come forth under your eyes, the result of your labours. I feel that the emptiness of my life is breaking my heart. For me, my hothouse is full of pining souls. The distress which I force myself to relieve saddens my very soul. I find some young mother without linen for her new-born babe, some old man starving, I make their troubles mine, and even when I have helped them, the feelings aroused in me by the sight of misery relieved are not enough to satisfy my soul. Oh! my friend, I feel that I have great powers asserting themselves in me, powers of doing evil, it may be, which nothing can crush—powers that the hardest commandments of religion cannot humble. When I go to see my mother, when I am quite alone among the fields, I feel that I must cry aloud, and I cry. My body is the prison in which one of the evil genii has pent up some moaning creature, until the mysterious word shall be uttered which shatters the cramping cell. But this comparison is not just. In my case it should be reversed.

It is the body which is a prisoner, if I may make use of the expression. Does not religion occupy my soul? And the treasures gained by reading are constant food for the mind. Why do I long for any change, even if it comes as suffering—for any break in the enervating peace of my lot? Unless I find some sentiment to uphold me, some strong interest to cultivate, I feel that I shall drift towards the abyss where every idea grows hazy and meaningless, where character is enervated, where the springs of one's being grow slack and inert, where I shall be no longer the woman Nature intended me to be. That is what my cries mean. . . . But you will not cease to send flowers to me because of this outcry of mine? Your friendship has been so sweet and pleasant a thing, that it has reconciled me with myself for several months. Yes, I feel happy when I think that you sometimes throw a friendly glance over the blossoming desert-place, my inner self; that the wanderer, half dead after her flight on the fiery steed of a dream, will meet with a kind word of greeting from you on her return.'

Three years after Véronique's marriage, it occurred to Graslin that his wife never used the horses, and, a good opportunity offering itself, he sold them. The carriages were sold at the same time, the coachman was dismissed, and the cook from Paris transferred to the Bishop's establishment. A woman servant took his place. Graslin ceased to give his wife an allowance, saying that he would pay all the bills. He was the happiest man in the world when he met with no opposition from the wife who had brought him a million. There was not much merit, it is true, in Mme. Graslin's self-denial. She knew nothing of money, she had been brought up in ignorance of it as an indispensable element in life. Graslin found the sums which he had given to her lying in a corner of her desk; scarcely any of it had been spent. Véronique

gave to the poor, her trousseau had been so large that as yet she had had scarcely any expenses for dress. Graslin praised Véronique to all Limoges as the pattern of wives.

The splendour of the furniture gave him pangs, so he had it all shrouded in covers. His wife's bedroom, boudoir, and dressing-room alone escaped this dispensation, an economical measure which economised nothing, for the wear and tear to the furniture is the same, covers or no covers.

He next took up his abode on the ground floor, where the counting-house and office had been established, so he began his old life again, and was as keen in pursuit of gain as before. The Auvergnat banker thought himself a model husband because he breakfasted and dined with his wife, who carefully ordered the meals for him; but he was so extremely unpunctual, that he came in at the proper hour scarce ten times a month; and though, out of thoughtfulness, he asked her never to wait for him, Véronique always stayed to carve for him; she wanted to fulfil her wifely duties in some one visible manner. His marriage had not been a matter to which the banker gave much thought; his wife represented the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand francs; he had not discovered that that wife shrank from him. Gradually he had left Mme. Graslin to herself, and became absorbed in business; and when he took it into his head to have a bed put for him in a room next to his private office, Véronique saw that his wishes were carried out at once.

So after three years of marriage this ill-assorted couple went their separate ways as before, and felt glad to return to them. The capitalist, owner now of eighteen hundred thousand francs, returned to his occupation of money-making with all the more zest after the brief interval. His two clerks and the office-boy were somewhat better lodged and a little better fed—that was all the difference between the past and the present. His wife had a cook

and a waiting-maid (the two servants could not well be dispensed with), and no calls were made on Graslin's purse except for strict necessaries.

And Véronique was happy in the turn things had taken; she saw in the banker's satisfaction a compensation for a separation for which she had never asked; it was impossible that Graslin should shrink from her as she shrank from him. She was half glad, half sorry of this secret divorce; she had looked forward to motherhood, which should bring a new interest into her life; but in spite of their mutual resignation, there was no child of the marriage as yet in 1828.

So Mme. Graslin, envied by all Limoges, led as lonely a life in her splendid home as formerly in her father's hovel; but the hopes and the childish joys of inexperience were gone. She lived in the ruins of her 'castles in Spain,' enlightened by sad experience, sustained by a devout faith, busying herself for the poor of the district, whom she loaded with kindnesses. She made baby-linen for them; she gave sheets and bedding to those who lay on straw; she went everywhere with her maid—a good Auvergnate whom her mother found for her. This girl attached herself body and soul to her mistress, and became a charitable spy for her, whose mission it was to find out trouble to soothe and distress to relieve. This life of busy benevolence and of punctilious performance of the duties enjoined by the Church was a hidden life, only known by the curés of the town who directed it, for Véronique took their counsel in all that she did, so that the money intended for the deserving poor should not be squandered by vice.

During these years Véronique found another friendship quite as precious to her and as warm as her friendship with old Grossetête. She became one of the flock of the Abbé Dutheil, one of the vicars-general of the diocese. This priest belonged to the small minority among the French clergy who lean towards concession,

who would fain associate the Church with the popular cause. By putting evangelical principles in practice, the Church should gain her old ascendency over the people, whom she could then bind to the Monarchy. But the Abbé Dutheil's merits were unrecognised, and he was persecuted. Perhaps he had seen that it was hopeless to attempt to enlighten the Court of Rome and the clerical party; perhaps he had sacrificed his convictions at the bidding of his superiors; at any rate, he dwelt within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy, knowing the while that the mere expression of his convictions would close his way to a bishopric. A great and Christian humility, blended with a lofty character, distinguished this eminent churchman. He had neither pride nor ambition, and stayed at his post, doing his duty in the midst of peril. The Liberal party in the town, who knew nothing of his motives, quoted his opinions in support of their own, and reckoned him as 'a patriot,' a word which means 'a revolutionary' for good Catholics. He was beloved by those below him, who did not dare to praise his worth; dreaded by his equals, who watched him narrowly; and a thorn in the side of his bishop. He was not exactly persecuted, his learning and virtues were too well known; it was impossible to find fault with him freely, though he criticised the blunders in policy by which the Throne and the Church alternately compromised each other, and pointed out the inevitable results; like poor Cassandra, he was reviled by his own party before and after the fall which he predicted. Nothing short of a Revolution was likely to shake the Abbé Dutheil from his place; he was a foundation stone in the Church, an unseen block of granite on which everything else rests. His utility was recognised, and—he was left in his place, like most of the real power of which mediocrity is jealous and afraid. If, like the Abbé de Lamennais, he had taken up the pen, he would probably have shared his fate; at him, too, the thunderbolts of Rome would have been launched.

In person the Abbé Dutheil was commanding. Something in his appearance spoke of a soul so profound that the surface is always calm and smooth. His height and spare frame did not mar the general effect of the outlines of his figure, which vaguely recalled those forms which Spanish painters loved best to paint for great monastic thinkers and dreamers—forms which Thorvaldsen in our own time has selected for his Apostles. His face, with the long, almost austere lines in it, which bore out the impression made by the straight folds of his garments, possessed the same charm which the sculptors of the Middle Ages discovered and recorded in the mystic figures about the doorways of their churches. His grave thoughts, grave words, and grave tones were all in keeping, and the expression of the Abbé's personality. At the first sight of the dark eyes, which austerity had surrounded with hollow shadowy circles; the forehead, yellowed like old marble; the bony outlines of the head and hands, no one could have expected to hear any voice but his, or any teaching but that which fell from his lips. It was this purely physical grandeur, in keeping with the moral grandeur of his nature, that gave him a certain seeming haughtiness and aloofness, belied, it is true, by his humility and his talk, yet unprepossessing in the first instance. In a higher position these qualities would have been advantages which would have enabled him to gain a necessary ascendency over the crowd—an ascendency which it is quick to feel and to recognise; but he was a subordinate, and a man's superiors never pardon him for possessing the natural insignia of power, the majesty so highly valued in an older time, and often so signally lacking in modern upholders of authority.

His colleague, the Abbé de Grancour, the other vicar-general of the diocese, a blue-eyed stout little man with a florid complexion, worked willingly enough with the Abbé Dutheil, albeit their opinions were diametrically opposed; a curious phenomenon, which only a wily courtier

will regard as a natural thing; but, at the same time, the Abbé de Grancour was very careful not to commit himself in any way which might cost him the favour of his bishop; the little man would have sacrificed anything (even convictions) to stand well in that quarter. He had a sincere belief in his colleague, he recognised his ability; in private he admitted his doctrines, while he condemned them in public; for men of his kind are attracted to a powerful character, while they fear and hate the superiority whose society they cultivate. 'He would put his arms round my neck while he condemned me,' said the Abbé Dutheil. The Abbé de Grancour had neither friends nor enemies, and was like to die a vicar-general. He gave out that he was drawn to Véronique's house by a wish to give a woman so benevolent and so devout the benefit of his counsels, and the Bishop signified his approval; but, in reality, he was only too delighted to spend an evening now and then in this way with the Abbé Dutheil.

From this time forward both priests became pretty constant visitors in Véronique's house; they used to bring her a sort of general report of any distress in the district, and talk over the best means of benefiting the poor morally and materially; but year by year M. Graslin drew the purse-strings closer and closer; for, in spite of ingenious excuses devised by his wife and Aline the maid, he suspected that all the money was not required for expenses of dress and housekeeping. He grew angry at last when he reckoned up the amount which his wife gave away. He himself would go through the bills with the cook, he went minutely into the details of their expenditure, and showed himself the great administrator that he was by demonstrating conclusively from his own experience that it was possible to live in luxury on three thousand francs per annum. Whereupon he compounded the matter with his wife by allowing her a hundred francs a month, to be duly accounted

for, pluming himself on the royal bounty of the grant. The garden, now handed over to him, was 'done up' of a Sunday by the porter, who had a liking for gardening. After the gardener was dismissed, the conservatory was turned to account as a warehouse, where Graslin deposited the goods left with him as security for small loans. The birds in the aviary above the ice-house were left to starve, to save the expense of feeding them; and when at length a winter passed without a single frost, he took that opportunity of declining to pay for ice any longer. By the year 1828 every article of luxury was curtailed, and parsimony reigned undisturbed in the Hôtel Graslin.

During the first three years after Graslin's marriage, with his wife at hand to make him follow out the doctor's instructions, his complexion had somewhat improved; now it inflamed again, and became redder and more florid than in the past. So largely, at the same time, did his business increase, that the porter was promoted to be a clerk (as his master had been before him), and another Auvergnat had to be found to do the odd jobs of the Hôtel Graslin.

After four years of married life the woman who had so much wealth had not three francs to call her own. To the niggardliness of her parents succeeded the no less niggardly dispensation of her husband; and Mme. Graslin, whose benevolent impulses were checked, felt the need of money for the first time.

In the beginning of the year 1828 Véronique had recovered the bloom of health which had lent such beauty to the innocent girl who used to sit at the window in the old house in the Rue de la Cité. She had read widely since those days; she had learned to think and to express her thoughts; the habit of forming accurate judgments had lent profundity to her features. The little details of social life had become familiar to her, she wore a fashionable toilette with the most perfect ease and

grace. If chance brought her into a drawing-room at this time, she found, not without surprise, that she was received with something like respectful esteem ; this way of regarding her, like her reception, was due to the two vicars-general and old Grossetête. The Bishop and one or two influential people, hearing of Véronique's unwearying benevolence, had talked about this fair life hidden from the world, this violet perfumed with virtues, this blossom of unfeigned piety. So, all unknown to Mme. Graslin, a revolution had been wrought in her favour ; one of those reactions so much the more lasting and sure because they are slowly effected. With this right-about-face in opinion Véronique became a power in the land. Her drawing-room was the resort of the luminaries of Limoges ; the practical change was brought about by this means.

The young Vicomte de Granville came to the town at the end of that year, preceded by the ready-made reputation which awaits a Parisian on his arrival in the provinces. He had been appointed deputy public prosecutor to the Court of Limoges. A few days after his arrival he said, in answer to a sufficiently silly question, that Mme. Graslin was the cleverest, most amiable, and most distinguished woman in the city, and this at the prefect's 'At Home,' and before a whole room full of people.

'And the most beautiful as well, perhaps?' suggested the Receiver-General's wife.

'There I do not venture to agree with you,' he answered ; 'when you are present I am unable to decide. Mme. Graslin's beauty is not of a kind which should inspire jealousy in you, she never appears in broad daylight. Mme. Graslin is only beautiful for those whom she loves ; you are beautiful for all eyes. If Mme. Graslin is deeply stirred, her face is transformed by its expression. It is like a landscape, dreary in winter, glorious in summer. Most people only see it in winter ; but if you

watch her while she talks with her friends on some literary or philosophical subject, or upon some religious question which interests her, her face lights up, and suddenly she becomes another woman, a woman of wonderful beauty.'

This declaration, a recognition of the same beautiful transfiguration which Véronique's face underwent as she returned to her place from the communion table, made a sensation in Limoges, for the new substitute (destined, it was said, to be Attorney-General one day) was the hero of the hour. In every country town a man a little above the ordinary level becomes for a shorter or longer time the subject of a craze, a sham enthusiasm to which the idol of the moment falls a victim. To these freaks of the provincial drawing-room we owe the local genius and the person who suffers from the chronic complaint of unappreciated superiority. Sometimes it is native talent which women discover and bring into fashion, but more frequently it is some outsider; and for once, in the case of the Vicomte de Granville, the homage was paid to genuine ability.

The Parisian found that Mme. Graslin was the only woman with whom he could exchange ideas or carry on a sustained and varied conversation; and a few months after his arrival, as the charm of her talk and manner gained upon him, he suggested to some of the prominent men in the town, and to the Abbé Dutheil among them, that they might make their party at whist of an evening in Mme. Graslin's drawing-room. So Véronique was at home to her friends for five nights in the week (two days she wished to keep free, she said, for her own concerns); and when the cleverest men in the town gathered about Mme. Graslin, others were not sorry to take brevet rank as wits by spending their evenings in her society. Véronique received the two or three distinguished military men stationed in the town or on the garrison staff. The entire freedom of discussion enjoyed

by her visitors, the absolute discretion required of them, tacitly and by the adoption of the manners of the best society, combined to make Véronique exclusive and very slow to admit those who courted the honour of her society to her circle. Other women saw not without jealousy that the cleverest and pleasantest men gathered round Mme. Graslin, and her power was the more widely felt in Limoges because she was exclusive. The four or five women whom she accepted were strangers to the district, who had accompanied their husbands from Paris, and looked on provincial tittle-tattle with disgust. If some one chanced to call who did not belong to the inner *cénacle*, the conversation underwent an immediate change, and with one accord all present spoke of indifferent things.

So the Hôtel Graslin became a sort of oasis in the desert where a chosen few sought relief in each other's society from the tedium of provincial life, a house where officials might discuss politics and speak their minds without fear of their opinions being reported, where all things worthy of mockery were fair game for wit and laughter, where every one laid aside his professional uniform to give his natural character free play.

In the beginning of that year 1828, Mme. Graslin, whose girlhood had been spent in the most complete obscurity, who had been pronounced to be plain and stupid and a complete nullity, was now looked upon as the most important person in the town, and the most conspicuous woman in society. No one called upon her in the morning, for her benevolence and her punctuality in the performance of her duties of religion were well known. She almost invariably went to the first mass, returning in time for her husband's early breakfast. He was the most unpunctual of men, but she always sat with him, for Graslin had learned to expect this little attention from his wife. As for Graslin, he never let slip an opportunity of praising her; he thought her perfection.

She never asked him for money; he was free to pile up silver crown on silver crown, and to expand his field of operations. He had opened an account with the firm of Brézac; he had set sail upon a commercial sea, and the horizon was gradually widening out before him; his over-stimulated interest, intent upon the great events of the green table called Speculation, kept him perpetually in the cold frenzied intoxication of the gambler.

During this happy year, and indeed until the beginning of the year 1829, Mme. Graslin's friends watched a strange change passing in her, under their eyes; her beauty became really extraordinary, but the reasons of the change were never discovered. Her eyes seemed to be bathed in a soft liquid light, full of tenderness, the blue iris widened like an expanding flower as the dark pupils contracted. Memories and happy thoughts seemed to light up her brow, which grew whiter, like some ridge of snow in the dawn, her features seemed to regain their purity of outline in some refining fire within. Her face lost the feverish brown colour which threatens inflammation of the liver, the malady of vigorous temperaments of troubled minds and thwarted affections. Her temples grew adorably fresh and youthful. Frequently her friends saw glimpses of the divinely fair face which a Raphael might have painted, the face which disease had covered with an ugly film, such as time spreads over the canvas of the great master. Her hands looked whiter, there was a delicate fulness in the rounded curves of her shoulders, her quick dainty movements displayed to the full the lissome grace of her form.

The women said that she was in love with M. de Granville, who, for that matter, paid assiduous court to her, though Véronique raised between them the barriers of a pious resistance. The deputy public prosecutor professed a respectful admiration for her which did not impose upon frequenters of her house. Clearer-sighted observers attributed to a different cause this change,

which made Véronique still more charming to her friends. Any woman, however devout, could not but feel in her inmost soul that it was sweet to be so courted, to know the satisfaction of living in a congenial atmosphere, the delight of exchanging ideas (so great a relief in a tedious life), the pleasure of the society of well-read and agreeable men, and of sincere friendships, which grew day by day. It needed, perhaps, an observer still more profound, more acute, or more suspicious than any of those who came to the Hôtel Graslin to divine the untamed greatness, the strength of the woman of the people pent up in the depths of Véronique's nature. Now and again they might surprise her in a torpid mood, overcast by gloomy or merely pensive musings, but all her friends knew that she carried many troubles in her heart; that, doubtless, in the morning she had been initiated into many sorrows, that she penetrated into dark places where vice is appalling by reason of its unblushing front. Not seldom, indeed, the Vicomte, soon promoted to be an *avocat général*, scolded her for some piece of blind benevolence discovered by him in the course of his investigations. Justice complained that Charity had paved the way to the police court.

'Do you want money for some of your poor people?' old Grossetête had asked on this, as he took her hand in his. 'I will share the guilt of your benefactions.'

'It is impossible to make everybody rich,' she answered, heaving a sigh.

An event occurred at the beginning of this year which was to change the whole current of Véronique's inner life, as well as the wonderful expression of her face, which henceforward became a portrait infinitely more interesting to a painter's eyes.

Graslin grew rather fidgety about his health, and to his wife's great despair left his ground-floor quarters and returned to her apartment to be tended. Soon afterwards Mme. Graslin's condition became a matter of town

gossip; she was about to become a mother. Her evident sadness, mingled with joy, filled her friends' thoughts; they then divined that, in spite of her virtues, she was happiest when she lived apart from her husband. Perhaps she had had hopes for better things since the day when the Vicomte de Granville had declined to marry the richest heiress in Limousin, and still continued to pay court to her. Ever since that event the profound politicians who exercise the censorship of sentiments, and settle other people's business in the intervals of whist, had suspected the lawyer and young Mme. Graslin of basing hopes of their own on the banker's failing health —hopes which were brought to nothing by this unexpected development. It was a time in Véronique's life when deep distress of mind was added to the apprehensions of a first confinement, always more perilous, it is said, when a woman is past her first youth, but all through those days her friends showed themselves more thoughtful for her; there was not one of them but made her feel in innumerable small ways what warmth there was in these friendships of hers, and how solid they had become.

II

TASCHERON

It was in the same year that Limoges witnessed the terrible spectacle and strange tragedy of the Tascheron case, in which the young Vicomte de Granville displayed the talents which procured him the appointment of public prosecutor at a later day.

An old man living in a lonely house on the outskirts of the Faubourg Saint-Etienne was murdered. A large orchard isolates the dwelling on the side of the town, on

the other there is a pleasure garden, with a row of unused hothouses at the bottom of it; then follow the open fields. The bank of the Vienne in this place rises up very steeply from the river, the little front garden slopes down to this embankment, and is bounded by a low wall surmounted by an open fence. Square stone posts are set along it at even distances, but the painted wooden railings are there more by way of ornament than as a protection to the property.

The old man, Pingret by name, a notorious miser, lived quite alone save for a servant, a country woman whom he employed in the garden. He trained his espaliers and pruned his fruit-trees himself, gathering his crops and selling them in the town, and excelled in growing early vegetables for the market. The old man's niece and sole heiress, who had married a M. des Vanneaulx, a man of small independent means, and lived in Limoges, had many a time implored her uncle to keep a man as a protection to the place, pointing out to him that he would be able to grow more garden produce in several borders planted with standard fruit-trees beneath which he now sowed millet and the like; but it was of no use, the old man would not hear of it. This contradiction in a miser gave rise to all sorts of conjectures in the houses where the Vanneaulx spent their evenings. The most divergent opinions had more than once divided parties at boston. Some knowing folk came to the conclusion that there was a treasure hidden under the growing luzern.

'If I were in Mme. des Vanneaulx's place,' remarked one pleasant gentleman, 'I would not worry my uncle, I know. If somebody murders him, well and good; somebody will murder him. I should come in for the property.'

Mme. des Vanneaulx, however, thought differently. As a manager at the Théâtre-Italien implores the tenor who 'draws' a full house to be very careful to wrap up

his throat, and gives him his cloak when the singer has forgotten his overcoat, so did Mme. des Vanneaulx try to watch over her relative. She had offered little Pingret a magnificent yard dog, but the old man sent the animal back again by Jeanne Malassis his servant.

'Your uncle has no mind to have one more mouth to feed up at our place,' said the handmaid to Mme. des Vanneaulx.

The event proved that his niece's fears had been but too well founded. Pingret was murdered one dark night in the patch of luzern, whither he had gone, no doubt, to add a few louis to a pot full of gold. The servant, awakened by the sounds of the struggle, had the courage to go to the old man's assistance, and the murderer found himself compelled to kill her also, lest she should bear witness against him. This calculation of probable risks, which nearly always prompts a man guilty of one murder to add another to his account, is one unfortunate result of the capital sentence which he beholds looming in the distance.

The double crime was accompanied by strange circumstances, which told as strongly for the defence as for the prosecution. When the neighbours had seen nothing of Pingret nor of the servant the whole morning; when, as they came and went, they looked through the wooden railings and saw that the doors and windows (contrary to wont) were still barred and fastened, the thing began to be bruited abroad through the Faubourg Saint-Étienne, till it reached Mme. desVanneaulx in the Rue des Cloches. Mme. des Vanneaulx, whose mind always ran on horrors, sent for the police, and the doors were broken open. In the four patches of luzern there were four gaping holes in the earth, surrounded by rubbish, and strewn with broken shards of the pots which had been full of gold the night before. In two of the holes, which had been partly filled up, they found the bodies of old Pingret and Jeanne Malassis, buried in their clothes;

she, poor thing, had run out barefooted in her night-dress.

While the public prosecutor, the commissary, and the examining magistrate took down all these particulars, the unlucky des Vanneaulx collected the scraps of broken pottery, put them together, and calculated the amount the jars should have held. The authorities, perceiving the common-sense of this proceeding, estimated the stolen treasure at a thousand pieces per pot; but what was the value of those coins? Had they been forty or forty-eight franc pieces, twenty-four or twenty francs? Every creature in Limoges who had expectations felt for the des Vanneaulx in this trying situation. The sight of those fragments of crockery ware which once held gold gave a lively stimulus to Limousin imaginations. As for little Pingret, who often came to sell his vegetables in the market himself, who lived on bread and onions, and did not spend three hundred francs in a year, who never did anybody a good turn, nor any harm either, no one regretted him in the least—he had never done a pennyworth of good to the Faubourg Saint-Étienne. As for Jeanne Malassis, her heroism was considered to be ill-timed; the old man if he had lived would have grudged her reward; altogether, her admirers were few compared with the number of those who remarked, 'I should have slept soundly in her place, I know!'

Then the curious and the next-of-kin were made aware of the inconsistencies of certain misers. The police, when they came to draw up the report, could find neither pen nor ink in the bare, cold, dismal, tumbledown house. The little old man's horror of expense was glaringly evident, in the great holes in the roof, which let in rain and snow as well as light; in the moss-covered cracks which rent the walls; in the rotting doors ready to drop from their hinges at the least shock, the unoiled paper which did duty as glass in the windows. There was not

a window curtain in the house, not a looking-glass over the mantel-shelves; the grates were chiefly remarkable for the absence of fire-irons and the accumulation of damp soot, a sort of varnish over the handful of sticks or the log of wood which lay on the hearth. And as to the furniture—a few crippled chairs and maimed arm-chairs, two beds, hard and attenuated (Time had adorned old Pingret's bed-curtains with open-work embroidery of a bold design), one or two cracked pots and riveted plates, a worm-eaten bureau, where the old man used to keep his garden seeds, household linen thick with darns and patches,—the furniture, in short, consisted of a mass of rags, which had only a sort of life kept in them by the spirit of their owner, and now that he was gone, they dropped to pieces and crumbled to powder. At the first touch of the brutal hands of the police officers and infuriated next-of-kin they evaporated, heaven knows how, and came to nameless ruin and an indefinable end. They were not. Before the terrors of a public auction they vanished away.

For a long time the greater part of the inhabitants of the capital of Limousin continued to take an interest in the hard case of the worthy des Vanneaulx, who had two children; but as soon as justice appeared to have discovered the perpetrator of the crime, this person absorbed all their attention, he became the hero of the day, and the des Vanneaulx were relegated to the obscurity of the background.

Towards the end of the month of March, Mme. Graslin had already felt the discomforts incidental to her condition, which could no longer be concealed. By that time inquiries were being made into the crime committed in the Faubourg Saint-Étienne, but the murderer was still at large. Véronique received visitors in her bedroom, whither her friends came for their game of whist. A few days later Mme. Graslin kept her room altogether. More than once already she had been seized with the

unaccountable fancies commonly attributed to women with child. Her mother came almost every day to see her; the two spent whole hours in each other's society.

It was nine o'clock. The card-tables were neglected, every one was talking about the murder and the des Vanneaulx, when the Vicomte de Granville came in.

'We have caught the man who murdered old Pingret!' he cried in high glee.

'And who is it?' The question came from all sides.

'One of the workmen in a porcelain factory, a man of exemplary conduct, and in a fair way to make his fortune. —He is one of your husband's old workmen,' he added, turning to Mme. Graslin.

'Who is it?' Véronique asked faintly.

'Jean-François Tascheron.'

'The unfortunate man!' she exclaimed. 'Yes. I remember seeing him several times. My poor father recommended him to me as a valuable hand——'

'He left the place before Sauviat died,' remarked old Mme. Sauviat; 'he went over to the MM. Philippart to better himself.—But is my daughter well enough to hear about this?' she added, looking at Mme. Graslin, who was as white as the sheets.

After that evening old Mother Sauviat left her house, and in spite of her seventy years, installed herself as her daughter's nurse. She did not leave Véronique's room. No matter at what hour Mme. Graslin's friends called to see her, they found the old mother sitting heroically at her post by the bedside, busied with her eternal knitting, brooding over her Véronique as in the days of the small-pox, answering for her child, and sometimes denying her to visitors. The love between the mother and daughter was so well known in Limoges that people took the old woman's ways as a matter of course.

A few days later, when the Vicomte de Granville

began to give some of the details of the Tascheron case, in which the whole town took an eager interest, thinking to interest the invalid, La Sauviat cut him short by asking if he meant to give Mme. Graslin bad dreams again, but Véronique begged M. de Granville to go on, fixing her eyes on his face. So it fell out that Mme. Graslin's friends heard in her house the result of the preliminary examination, soon afterwards made public, at first-hand from the *avocat général*. Here, in a condensed form, is the substance of the indictment which was being drawn up by the prosecution:—

Jean-François Tascheron was the son of a small farmer burdened with a large family, who lived in the township of Montégnac. Twenty years before the perpetration of this crime, whose memory still lingers in Limousin, Canton Montégnac bore a notoriously bad character. It was a proverb in the Criminal Court of Limoges that fifty out of every hundred convictions came from the Montégnac district. Since 1816, two years after the arrival of the new curé, M. Bonnet, Montégnac lost its old reputation, and no longer sent up its contingent to the assizes. The change was generally set down to M. Bonnet's influence in the commune, which had once been a perfect hotbed of bad characters who gave trouble in all the country round about. Jean-François Tascheron's crime suddenly restored Montégnac to its former unenviable pre-eminence. It happened, singularly enough, that the Taschérons had been almost the only family in the countryside which had not departed from the old exemplary traditions and religious habits now fast dying out in country places. In them the curé had found a moral support and basis of operations, and naturally he thought a great deal of them. The whole family were hard workers, remarkable for their honesty and the strong affection that bound them to each other; Jean-François Tascheron had had none but good

examples set before him at home. A praiseworthy ambition had brought him to Limoges. He meant to make a little fortune honestly by a handicraft, and left the township, to the regret of his relations and friends, who were much attached to him.

His conduct during his two years of apprenticeship was admirable; apparently no irregularity in his life had foreshadowed the hideous crime for which he forfeited his life. The leisure which other workmen wasted in the wineshop and debauches, Tascheron spent in study.

Justice in the provinces has plenty of time on her hands, but the most minute investigation threw no light whatever on the secrets of this existence. The landlady of Jean-François's humble lodging, skilfully questioned, said that she had never had such a steady young man as a lodger. He was pleasant-spoken and good-tempered, almost gay, as you might say. About a year ago a change seemed to come over him. He would stop out all night several times a month, and often for several nights at a time. She did not know whereabouts in the town he spent those nights. Still, she had sometimes thought, judging by the mud on his boots, that her lodger had been somewhere out in the country. He used to wear pumps, too, instead of hobnailed boots, although he was going out of the town, and before he went he used to shave and scent himself, and put on clean clothes.

The examining magistrate carried his investigations to such a length that inquiries were made in houses of ill fame and among licensed prostitutes, but no one knew anything of Jean-François Tascheron; other inquiries made among the class of factory operatives and shop-girls met with no better success; none of those whose conduct was light had any relations with the accused.

A crime without any motive whatever is inconceivable, especially when the criminal's bent was apparently

towards self-improvement, while his ambitions argued higher ideals and sense superior to that of other workmen. The whole criminal department, like the examining magistrate, were fain to find a motive for the murder in a passion for play on Tascheron's part; but after minute investigation, it was proved that the accused had never gambled in his life.

From the very first Jean-François took refuge in a system of denial which could not but break down in the face of circumstantial evidence when his case should come before a jury; but his manner of defending himself suggested the intervention of some person well acquainted with the law, or gifted with no ordinary intelligence. The evidence of his guilt, as in most similar cases, was at once unconvincing and yet too strong to be set aside. The principal points which told against Tascheron were four—his absence from home on the night of the murder (he would not say where he spent that night, and scorned to invent an *alibi*); a shred of his blouse, torn without his knowledge during the struggle with the poor servant-girl, and blown by the wind into the tree where it was found; the fact that he had been seen hanging about the house that evening by people in the suburb, who would not have remembered this but for the crime which followed; and lastly, a false key which he had made to fit the lock of the garden-gate, which was entered from the fields. It had been hidden rather ingeniously in one of the holes, some two feet below the surface. M. des Vanneaulx had come upon it while digging to see whether by chance there might be a second hoard beneath the first. The police succeeded in finding out the man who supplied the steel, the vice, and the key-file. This had been their first clue, it put them on Tascheron's track, and finally they arrested him on the limits of the department in a wood where he was waiting for the diligence. An hour later, and he would have been on his way to America. More-

over, in spite of the care with which the footprints had been erased in the trampled earth and on the muddy road, the rural policeman had found the marks of thin shoes, clear and unmistakable, in the soil. Tascheron's lodgings were searched, and a pair of pumps were found which exactly corresponded with the impress, a fatal coincidence which confirmed the curious observations of his landlady.

Then the criminal investigation department saw another influence at work in the crime, and a second and perhaps a prime mover in the case. Tascheron must have had an accomplice, if only for the reason that it was impossible for one man to take away such a weight of coin. No man, however strong, could carry twenty-five thousand francs in gold very far. If each of the pots had held so much, he must have made four journeys. Now, a singular accident determined the very hour when the deed was done. Jeanne Malassis, springing out of bed in terror at her master's shrieks, had overturned the table on which her watch lay (the one present which the miser had made her in five years). The fall had broken the mainspring, and stopped the hands at two o'clock.

In mid-March, the time of the murder, the sun rises between five and six in the morning. So on the hypothesis traced out by the police and the department, it was clearly impossible that Tascheron should have carried off the money unaided and alone, even for a short distance in the time. The evident pains which the man had taken to erase other footprints to the neglect of his own, also indicated an unknown assistant.

Justice, driven to invent some reason for the crime, decided on a frantic passion for some woman, and as she was not to be found among the lower classes, forensic sagacity looked higher.

Could it be some woman of the bourgeoisie who, feeling sure of the discretion of a lover of so puritanical

a cut, had read with him the opening chapters of a romance which had ended in this ugly tragedy? There were circumstances in the case which almost bore out this theory. The old man had been killed by blows from a spade. The murder, it seemed, was the result of chance, a sudden fortuitous development, and not a part of a deliberate plan. The two lovers might perhaps have concerted the theft, but not the second crime. Then Tascheron the lover and Pingret the miser had crossed each other's paths, and in the thick darkness of night two inexorable passions met on the same spot, both attracted thither by gold.

Justice devised a new plan for obtaining light on these dark data. Jean-François had a favourite sister; her they arrested and examined privately, hoping in this way to come by a knowledge of the mysteries of her brother's private life. Denise Tascheron denied all knowledge of his affairs; prudence dictating a system of negative answers which led her questioners to suspect that she really knew the reasons of the crime. Denise Tascheron, as a matter of fact, knew nothing whatever about it, but for the rest of her days she was to be under a cloud in consequence of her detention.

The accused showed a spirit very unusual in a working man. He was too clever for the cleverest 'sheep of the prisons' with whom he came in contact—though he did not discover that he had to do with a spy. The keener intelligences among the magistracy saw in him a murderer through passion, not through necessity, like the common herd of criminals who pass by way of the petty sessions and the hulks to a capital charge. He was shrewdly plied with questions put with this idea; but the man's wonderful discretion left the magistrates much where they were before. The romantic but plausible theory of a passion for a woman of higher rank, once admitted, insidious questions were suddenly asked more than once; but Jean-François's discretion issued victorious

from all the mental tortures which the ingenuity of an examining magistrate could inflict.

As a final expedient, Tascheron was told that the person for whom he had committed the crime had been discovered and arrested; but his face underwent no change, he contented himself with the ironical retort, 'I should be very glad to see that person!'

When these details became known, there were plenty of people who shared the magistrate's suspicions, confirmed to all appearance by the behaviour of the accused, who maintained the silence of a savage. An all-absorbing interest attached to a young man who had come to be a problem. Every one will understand how the public curiosity was stimulated by the facts of the case, and how eagerly reports of the examination were followed; for in spite of all the probings of the police, the case for the prosecution remained on the brink of a mystery, which the authorities did not dare to penetrate, beset with dangers as it was. In some cases a half-certainty is not enough for the magistracy. So it was hoped that the buried truth would arise and come to light at the great day of the Assizes, an occasion when criminals frequently lose their heads.

It happened that M. Graslin was on the jury empannelled for the occasion, and Véronique could not but hear through him or through M. de Granville the whole story of a trial which kept Limousin, and indeed all France, in excitement for a fortnight. The behaviour of the prisoner at the bar justified the romances founded on the conjectures of justice which were current in the town; more than once his eyes were turned searchingly on the bevy of women privileged to enjoy the spectacle of a sensational drama in real life. Every time that the clear impenetrable gaze was turned on the fashionable audience, it produced a flutter of consternation, so greatly did every woman fear lest she might seem to inquisitive eyes in the Court to be the prisoner's partner in guilt.

The useless efforts of the criminal investigation department were then made public, and Limoges was informed of the precautions taken by the accused to ensure the complete success of his crime.

Some months before that fatal night, Jean-François had procured a passport for North America. Clearly he had meant to leave France. Clearly, therefore, the woman in the case must be married; for there was, of course, no object to be gained by eloping with a young girl. Perhaps it was a desire to maintain the fair unknown in luxury which had prompted the crime; but, on the other hand, a search through the registers of the administration had discovered that no passport for that country had been made out in a woman's name. The police had even investigated the registers in Paris as well as those of the neighbouring prefectures, but fruitlessly.

As the case proceeded, every least detail brought to light revealed profound forethought on the part of a man of no ordinary intelligence. While the most virtuous ladies of Limousin explained the sufficiently inexplicable use of evening shoes for a country excursion on muddy roads and heavy soil, by the plea that it was necessary to spy upon old Pingret; the least coxcombically given of men were delighted to point out how eminently a pair of thin pumps favoured noiseless movements about a house, scaling windows, and stealing along corridors.

Evidently Jean-François Tascheron and his mistress, a young, romantic, and beautiful woman (for every one drew a superb portrait of the lady), had contemplated forgery, and the words 'and wife' were to be filled in after his name on the passport.

Card-parties were broken up during these evenings by malicious conjectures and comments. People began to cast about for the names of women who went to Paris during March 1829; or of others who might be supposed to have made preparations openly or secretly for flight. The trial supplied Limoges with a second Fualdès case,

with an unknown Mme. Manson by way of improvement on the first. Never, indeed, was any country town so puzzled as Limoges after the Court rose each day. People's very dreams turned on the trial. Everything that transpired raised the accused in their eyes; his answers, skilfully turned over and over, expanded and edited, supplied a theme for endless argument. One of the jury asked, for instance, why Tascheron had taken a passport for America, to which the prisoner replied that he meant to open a porcelain factory there. In this way he screened his accomplice without quitting his line of defence, and supplied conjecture with a plausible and sufficient motive for the crime in this ambition of his.

In the thick of these disputes, it was impossible that Véronique's friends should not also try to account for Tascheron's close reserve. One evening she seemed better than usual. The doctor had prescribed exercise; and that very morning Véronique, leaning on her mother's arm, had walked out as far as Mme. Sauviat's cottage, and rested there a while. When she came home again, she tried to sit up until her husband returned, but Graslin was late, and did not come back from the Court till eight o'clock; his wife waited on him at dinner after her custom, and in this way could not but hear the discussion between himself and his friends.

'We should have known more about this if my poor father were still alive,' said Véronique, 'or perhaps the man would not have committed the crime—— But I notice that you have all of you taken one strange notion into your heads! You will have it that there is a woman at the bottom of this business (as far as that goes I myself am of your opinion), but why do you think that she is a married woman? Why cannot he have loved some girl whose father and mother refused to listen to him?'

'Sooner or later a young girl might have been legitimately his,' returned M. de Granville. 'Tascheron is not wanting in patience; he would have had time to make

an independence honestly; he could have waited until the girl was old enough to marry without her parents' consent.'

'I did not know that such a marriage was possible,' said Mme. Graslin. 'Then how is it that no one had the least suspicion of it, here in a place where everybody knows the affairs of everybody else, and sees all that goes on in his neighbour's house? Two people cannot fall in love without at any rate seeing each other or being seen of each other! What do you lawyers think?' she continued, looking the *avocat général* full in the eyes.

'We all think that the woman must be the wife of some tradesman, a man in business.'

'I am of a totally opposite opinion,' said Mme. Graslin. 'That kind of woman has not sentiments sufficiently lofty,' a retort which drew all eyes upon her. Every one waited for the explanation of the paradox.

'At night,' she said, 'when I do not sleep, or when I lie in bed in the daytime, I cannot help thinking over this mysterious business, and I believe I can guess Tascheron's motives. These are my reasons for thinking that it is a girl, and not a woman in the case. A married woman has other interests, if not other feelings; she has a divided heart in her, she cannot rise to the full height of the exaltation inspired by a love so passionate as this. She must never have borne a child if she is to conceive a love in which maternal instincts are blended with those which spring from desire. It is quite clear that some woman who wished to be a sustaining power to him has loved this man. That unknown woman must have brought to her love the genius which inspires artists and poets, ay, and women also, but in another form, for it is a woman's destiny to create, not things, but men. Our creations are our children, our children are our pictures, our books and statues. Are we not artists when we shape their lives from the first? So I am sure that if she is not a girl, she is not a mother; I

would stake my head upon it. Lawyers should have a woman's instinct to apprehend the infinite subtle touches which continually escape them in so many cases.

'If I had been your substitute,' she continued, turning to M. de Granville, 'we should have discovered the guilty woman, always supposing that she is guilty. I think, with M. l'Abbé Dutheil, that the two lovers had planned to go to America, and to live there on poor Pingret's money, as they had none of their own. The theft, of course, led to the murder, the usual fatal consequence of the fear of detection and death. 'And it would be worthy of you,' she added, with a suppliant glance at the young lawyer, 'to withdraw the charge of malice aforethought; you would save the miserable man's life. He is so great in spite of his crime, that he would perhaps expiate his sins by some magnificent repentance. The works of repentance should be taken into account in the deliberations of justice. In these days are there no better ways of atoning an offence than by the loss of a head, or by founding, as in olden times, a Milan cathedral?'

'Madame, your ideas are sublime,' returned the lawyer; 'but if the averment of malice aforethought were withdrawn, Tascheron would still be tried for his life; and it is a case of aggravated theft, it was committed at night, the walls were scaled, the premises broken into——'

'Then, do you think he will be condemned?' she asked, lowering her eyelids.

'I do not doubt it. The prosecution has the best of it.'

A light shudder ran through Mme. Graslin. Her dress rustled.

'I feel cold,' she said.

She took her mother's arm, and went to bed.

'She is much better to-day,' said her friends.

The next morning Veronique was at death's door.

She smiled at her doctor's surprise at finding her in an almost dying state.

'Did I not tell you that the walk would do me no good?' she asked.

Ever since the opening of the trial there had been no trace of either swagger or hypocrisy in Tascheron's attitude. The doctor, always with a view to diverting his patient's mind, tried to explain this attitude out of which the counsel for the defence made capital for his client. The counsel's cleverness, the doctor opined, had dazzled the accused, who imagined that he should escape the capital sentence. Now and then an expression crossed his face which spoke plainly of hopes of some coming happiness greater than mere acquittal or reprieve. The whole previous life of this man of twenty-three was such a flat contradiction to the deeds which brought it to a close that his champions put forward his behaviour as a conclusive argument. In fact, the clues spun by the police into a stout hypothesis fit to hang a man, dwindled so pitiably when woven into the romance of the defence, that the prisoner's counsel fought for his client's life with some prospect of success. To save him he shifted the ground of the combat, and fought the battle out on the question of malice aforethought. It was admitted, without prejudice, that the robbery had been planned beforehand, but contended that the double murder had been the result of an unexpected resistance in both cases. The issue looked doubtful; neither side had made good their case.

When the doctor went, the *avocat général* came in as usual to see Véronique before he went to the Court.

'I have read the counsel's speeches yesterday,' she told him. 'To-day the other side will reply. I am so very much interested in the prisoner, that I should like him to be saved. Could you not forgo a triumph for once in your life? Let the counsel for the defence gain

the day. Come, make me a present of this life, and—perhaps—some day mine shall be yours—— There is a doubt after that fine speech of Tascheron's counsel; well, then, why not——'

'Your voice is quivering——' said the Vicomte, almost taken by surprise.

'Do you know why?' she asked. 'My husband has just pointed out a coincidence—hideous for a sensitive nature like mine—a thing that is like to cause me my death. You will give the order for his head to fall just about the time when my child will be born.'

'Can I reform the Code?' asked the public prosecutor.

'There, go! You do not know how to love!' she answered, and closed her eyes.

She lay back on her pillow, and dismissed the lawyer with an imperative gesture.

M. Graslin pleaded hard, but in vain, for an acquittal, advancing an argument, first suggested to him by his wife, and taken up by two of his friends on the jury: 'If we spare the man's life, the des Vanneaulx will recover Pingret's money.' This irresistible argument told upon the jury, and divided them—seven for acquittal as against five. As they failed to agree, the President and assessors were obliged to add their suffrages, and they were on the side of the minority. Jean-François Tascheron was found guilty of murder.

When sentence was passed, Tascheron burst into a blind fury, natural enough in a man full of strength and life, but seldom seen in Court when it is an innocent man who is condemned. It seemed to every one who saw it that the drama was not brought to an end by the sentence. So obstinate a struggle (as often happens in such cases) gave rise to two diametrically opposite opinions as to the guilt of the central figure in it. Some saw oppressed innocence in him, others a criminal justly punished. The Liberal party felt it incumbent upon them to believe in Tascheron's innocence; it was not

so much conviction on their part as a desire to annoy those in office.

'What?' cried they. 'Is a man to be condemned because his foot happens to suit the size of a footmark? —Because, forsooth, he was not at his lodgings at the time? (As if any young fellow would not die sooner than compromise a woman!)—Because he borrowed tools and bought steel?—(for it has not been proved that he made the key).—Because some one finds a blue rag in a tree, where old Pingret very likely put it himself to scare the sparrows, and it happens to match a slit made in the blouse?—Take a man's life on such grounds as these! And, after all, Jean-François has denied every charge, and the prosecution did not produce any witness who had seen him commit the crime.'

Then they fell to corroborating, amplifying, and paraphrasing the speeches made by the prisoner's counsel and his line of defence. As for Pingret; what was Pingret? A money-box which had been broken open; so said the freethinkers.

A few so-called Progressives, who did not recognise the sacred laws of property (which the Saint-Simonians had already attacked in the abstract region of Economical Theory), went further still.

'Old Pingret,' said these, 'was the prime author of the crime. The man was robbing his country by hoarding the gold. What a lot of businesses that idle capital might have fertilised! He had thwarted industry; he was properly punished.'

As for the servant-girl, they were sorry for her; and Denise, who had baffled the ingenuity of the lawyers, the girl who never opened her mouth at the trial without long pondering over what she meant to say, excited the keenest interest. She became a figure comparable, in another sense, with Jeanie Deans, whom she resembled in charm of character, modesty, in her religious nature and personal comeliness. So François Tascheron still

continued to excite the curiosity not merely of Limoges, but of the whole department. Some romantic women openly expressed their admiration of him.

'If there is a love for some woman above him at the bottom of all this,' said these ladies, 'the man is certainly no ordinary man. You will see that he will die bravely!'

Would he confess? Would he keep silence? Bets were taken on the question. Since that outburst of rage with which he received his doom (an outburst which might have had a fatal ending for several persons in court but for the intervention of the police), the criminal threatened violence indiscriminately to all and sundry who came near him, and with the ferocity of a wild beast. The gaoler was obliged to put him in a strait waistcoat; for if he was dangerous to others, he seemed quite as likely to attempt his own life. Tascheron's despair, thus restrained from all overt acts of violence, found a vent in convulsive struggles which frightened the warders, and in language which, in the Middle Ages, would have been set down to demoniacal possession.

He was so young that women were moved to pity that a life so filled with an all-engrossing love should be cut off. Quite recently, and as if written for the occasion, Victor Hugo's sombre elegy and vain plea for the abolition of the death-penalty (that support of the fabric of society) had appeared, and *Le Dernier jour d'un Condamné* was the order of the day in all conversations. Then finally, above the boards of the Assizes, set, as it were, upon a pedestal, rose the invisible mysterious figure of a woman, standing there with her feet dipped in blood; condemned to suffer heartrending anguish, yet outwardly to live in unbroken household peace. At her every one pointed the finger—and yet, they almost admired that Limousin Medea with the inscrutable brow and the heart of steel in her white breast. Perhaps she dwelt in

the home of this one or that, and was the sister, cousin, wife, or daughter of such an one. What a horror in their midst! It is in the domain of the Imagination, according to Napoleon, that the power of the Unknown is incalculably great.

As for the des Vanneaulx's hundred thousand francs, all the efforts of the police had not succeeded in recovering the money; and the criminal's continued silence was a strange defeat for the prosecution. M. de Granville (in the place of the public prosecutor then absent at the Chamber of Deputies) tried the commonplace stratagem of inducing the condemned man to believe that the penalty might be commuted if a full confession were made. But the lawyer had scarcely showed himself before the prisoner greeted him with furious yells, and epileptic contortions, and eyes ablaze with anger and regret that he could not kill his enemy. Justice could only hope that the Church might effect something at the last moment. Again and again the des Vanneaulx applied to the Abbé Pascal, the prison chaplain. The Abbé Pascal was not deficient in the peculiar quality which gains a priest a hearing from a prisoner. In the name of religion, he braved Tascheron's transports of rage, and strove to utter a few words amidst the storms that convulsed that powerful nature. But the struggle between spiritual paternity and the tempest of uncontrolled passions was too much for poor Abbé Pascal; he retired from it defeated and worn out.

'That is a man who has found his heaven here on earth,' the old priest murmured softly to himself.

Then little Mme. des Vanneaulx thought of approaching the criminal herself, and took counsel of her friends. The Sieur des Vanneaulx talked of compromise. Being at his wits' end, he even betook himself to M. de Granville, and suggested that he (M. de Granville) should intercede with the King for his uncle's murderer if only, *if only*, the murderer would hand over those

hundred thousand francs to the proper persons. The *avocat général* retorted that the King's Majesty would not stoop to haggle with criminals. Then the des Vanneaulx tried Tascheron's counsel, offering him twenty per cent. on the total amount as an inducement to recover it for them. This lawyer was the one creature whom Tascheron could see without flying into a fury; him, therefore, the next-of-kin empowered to offer ten per cent. to the murderer, to be paid over to the man's family. But in spite of the mutilations which these beavers were prepared to make in their heritage, in spite of the lawyer's eloquence, Tascheron continued obdurate. Then the des Vanneaulx, waxing wroth, anathematised the condemned man and called down curses upon his head.

'He is not only a murderer, he has no sense of decency!' cried they, in all seriousness, ignorant though they were of the famous *Plaint of Fualdès*. The Abbe Pascal had totally failed, the application for a reversal of judgment seemed likely to succeed no better, the man would go to the guillotine, and then all would be lost.

'What good will our money be to him where he is going?' they wailed. 'A murder you can understand, but to steal a thing that is of no use! The thing is inconceivable. What times we live in, to be sure, when people of quality take an interest in such a bandit! He does not deserve it.'

'He has very little sense of honour,' said Mme. des Vanneaulx.

'Still, suppose that giving up the money should compromise his sweetheart!' suggested an old maid.

'We would keep his secret,' cried the Sieur des Vanneaulx.

'But then you would become accessories after the fact,' objected a lawyer.

'Oh! the scamp!' This was the Sieur des Vanneaulx's conclusion of the whole matter.

The des Vanneaulx's debates were reported with some amusement to Mme. Graslin by one of her circle, a very clever woman, a dreamer and idealist, for whom everything must be faultless. The speaker regretted the condemned man's fury; she would have had him cold, calm, and dignified.

'Do you not see,' said Véronique, 'that he is thrusting temptation aside and baffling their efforts. He is deliberately acting like a wild beast.'

'Besides,' objected the Parisienne in exile, 'he is not a gentleman, he is only a common man.'

'If he had been a gentleman, it would have been all over with that unknown woman long ago,' Mme. Graslin answered.

These events, twisted and tortured in drawing-rooms and family circles, made to bear endless constructions, picked to pieces by the most expert tongues in the town, all contributed to invest the criminal with a painful interest, when, two months later, the appeal for mercy was rejected by the Supreme Court. How would he bear himself in his last moments? He had boasted that he would make so desperate a fight for his life that it was impossible that he should lose it. Would he confess?—Would his conduct belie his language?—Which side would win their wagers?—Are you going to be there?—Are you not going?—How are we to go? As a matter of fact, the distance from the prison of Limoges to the place of execution is very short, sparing the dreadful ordeal of a long transit to the prisoner, but also limiting the number of fashionable spectators. The prison is in the same building as the Palais de Justice, at the corner of the Rue du Palais and the Rue du Pont-Hérisson. The Rue du Palais is the direct continuation of the short Rue de Monte-à-Regret which leads to the Place d'Aîne or des Arênes, where executions take place (hence, of course, its name). The way, as has been said, is very short, consequently there are not many houses

along it, and but few windows. What persons of fashion would care to mingle with the crowd in the square on such an occasion?

But the execution expected from day to day was day after day put off, to the great astonishment of the town, and for the following reasons. The pious resignation of the greatest scoundrels on their way to death is a triumph reserved for the Church, and a spectacle which seldom fails to impress the crowd. Setting the interests of Christianity totally aside (although this is a principle never lost sight of by the Church), the condemned man's repentance is too strong a testimony to the power of religion for the clergy not to feel that a failure on these conspicuous occasions is a heartbreaking misfortune. This feeling was aggravated in 1829, for party spirit ran high and poisoned everything, however small, which had any bearing on politics. The Liberals were in high glee at the prospect of a public collapse of the 'priestly party,' an epithet invented by Montlosier, a Royalist who went over to the Constitutionals and was carried by his new associates further than he intended. A party, in its corporate capacity, is guilty of disgraceful actions which in an individual would be infamous, and so it happens that when one man stands out conspicuous as the expression and incarnation of that party, in the eyes of the crowd he is apt to become a Robespierre, a Judge Jeffreys, a Laubardemont—a sort of altar of expiation to which others equally guilty attach ex votos in secret.

There was an understanding between the episcopal authorities and the police authorities, and still the execution was put off, partly to secure a triumph for religion, but quite as much for another reason—by the aid of religion justice hoped to arrive at the truth. The power of the public prosecutor, however, had its limits; sooner or later the sentence must be carried out; and the very Liberals who insisted, for the sake of opposition, on Tascheron's innocence, and had tried to upset the case,

now began to grumble at the delay. Opposition, when systematic, is apt to fall into inconsistencies; for the point in question is not to be in the right, but to have a stone always ready to sling at authority. So towards the beginning of August, the hand of authority was forced by the clamour (often a chance sound echoed by empty heads) called public opinion. The execution was announced.

In this extremity the Abbé Dutheil took it upon himself to suggest a last resource to the bishop. One result of the success of this plan will be the introduction of another actor in the judicial drama, the extraordinary personage who forms a connecting-link between the different groups in it; the greatest of all the figures in this *Scène*; the guide who should hereafter bring Mme. Graslin on a stage where her virtues were to shine forth with the brightest lustre; where she would exhibit a great and noble charity, and act the part of a Christian and a ministering angel.

The Bishop's palace at Limoges stands on the hillside above the Vienne. The gardens, laid out in terraces supported by solidly built walls, crowned by balustrades, descend stepwise, following the fall of the land to the river. The sloping ridge rises high enough to give the spectator on the opposite bank the impression that the Faubourg Saint-Étienne nestles at the foot of the lowest terrace of the Bishop's garden. Thence, as you walk in one direction, you look out across the river, and in the other along its course through the broad fertile landscape. When the Vienne has flowed westwards past the palace gardens, it takes a sudden turn towards Limoges, skirting the Faubourg Saint-Martial in a graceful curve. A little further, and beyond the suburb, it passes a charming country house called the Cluzeau. You can catch a glimpse of the walls from the nearest point of the nearest terrace, a trick of the perspective uniting them with the church towers of the suburb.

Opposite the Cluzeau lies the island in the river, with its indented shores, its thick growing poplars and forest-trees, the island which Véronique in her girlhood called the Isle of France. Eastwards, the low hills shut in the horizon like the walls of an amphitheatre.

The charm of the situation and the rich simplicity of the architecture of the palace mark it out among the other buildings of a town not conspicuously happy in the choice or employment of its building materials. The view from the gardens, which attracts travellers in search of the picturesque, had long been familiar to the Abbé Dutheil. He had brought M. de Grancour with him this evening, and went down from terrace to terrace, taking no heed of the sunset shedding its crimson and orange and purple over the balustrades along the steps, the houses on the suburb, and the waters of the river. He was looking for the Bishop, who at that moment sat under the vines in a corner of the furthest terrace, taking his dessert, and enjoying the charms of the evening at his ease.

The long shadows cast by the poplars on the island fell like a bar across the river ; the sunlight lit up their topmost crests, yellowed somewhat already, and turned the leaves to gold. The glow of the sunset, differently reflected from the different masses of green, composed a glorious harmony of subdued and softened colour. A faint evening breeze stirring in the depths of the valley ruffled the surface of the Vienne into a broad sheet of golden ripples that brought out in contrast all the sober hues of the roofs in the Faubourg Saint-Étienne. The church towers and house-tops of the Faubourg Saint-Martial were blended in the sunlight with the vine stems of the trellis. The faint hum of the country town, half hidden in the re-entering curve of the river, the softness of the air,—all sights and sounds combined to steep the prelate in the calm recommended for the digestion by the authors of every treatise on that topic.

Unconsciously the Bishop fixed his eyes on the right bank of the river, on a spot where the lengthening shadows of the poplars in the island had reached the bank by the Faubourg Saint-Étienne, and darkened the walls of the garden close to the scene of the double murder of old Pingret and the servant; and just as his snug felicity of the moment was troubled by the difficulties which his vicars-general recalled to his recollection, the Bishop's expression grew inscrutable by reason of many thoughts. The two subordinates attributed his absence of mind to ennui; but, on the contrary, the Bishop had just discovered in the sands of the Vienne the key to the puzzle, the clue which the des Vanneaulx and the police were seeking in vain.

'My lord,' began the Abbé de Grancour, as he came up to the Bishop, 'everything has failed; we shall have the sorrow of seeing that unhappy Tascheron die in mortal sin. He will bellow the most awful blasphemies; he will heap insults on poor Abbé Pascal; he will spit on the crucifix, and deny everything, even hell-fire.'

'He will frighten the people,' said the Abbé Dutheil. 'The very scandal and horror of it will cover our defeat and our inability to prevent it. So, as I was saying to M. de Grancour as we came, may this scene drive more than one sinner back to the bosom of the Church.'

His words seemed to trouble the Bishop, who laid down the bunch of grapes which he was stripping on the table, wiped his fingers, and signed to his two vicars-general to be seated.

'The Abbé Pascal has managed badly,' said he at last.

'He is quite ill after the last scene with the prisoner,' said the Abbé de Grancour. 'If he had been well enough to come, we should have brought him with us to explain the difficulties which put all the efforts which your lordship might command out of our power.'

'The condemned man begins to sing obscene songs at the top of his voice when he sees one of us; the noise

drowns every word as soon as you try to make yourself heard,' said a young priest who was sitting beside the Bishop.

The young speaker leant his right elbow on the table, his white hand drooped carelessly over the bunches of grapes as he selected the reddest berries, with the air of being perfectly at home. He had a charming face, and seemed to be either a table-companion or a favourite with the Bishop, and was in fact a favourite and the prelate's table-companion. As the younger brother of the Baron de Rastignac he was connected with the Bishop of Limoges by the ties of family relationship and affection. Considerations of fortune had induced the young man to enter the Church; and the Bishop, aware of this, had taken his young relative as his private secretary until such time as advancement might befall him; for the Abbé Gabriel bore a name which predestined him to the highest dignities of the Church.

'Then have you been to see him, my son?' asked the Bishop.

'Yes, my lord. As soon as I appeared, the miserable man poured out a torrent of the most disgusting language against you and me; his behaviour made it impossible for a priest to stay with him. Will you permit me to offer you a piece of advice, my lord?'

'Let us hear the wisdom which God sometimes puts into the mouth of babes,' said the Bishop.

'Did he not cause Balaam's ass to speak?' the young Abbé de Rastignac retorted quickly.

'According to some commentators, the ass was not very well aware of what she was saying,' the Bishop answered, laughing.

Both the vicars-general smiled. In the first place, it was the Bishop's joke; and in the second, it glanced lightly on this young Abbe, of whom all the dignitaries and ambitious churchmen grouped about the Bishop were envious.

'My advice would be to beg M. de Granville to put off the execution for a few days yet. If the condemned man knew that he owed those days of grace to our intercession, he would perhaps make some show of listening to us, and if he listens——'

'He will persist in his conduct when he sees what comes of it,' said the Bishop, interrupting his favourite. —'Gentlemen,' he resumed after a moment's pause, 'is the town acquainted with these details?'

'Where will you find the house where they are not discussed?' answered the Abbé de Grancour. 'The condition of our good Abbé Pascal since his last interview is matter of common talk at this moment.'

'When is Tascheron to be executed?' asked the Bishop.

'To-morrow. It is market day,' replied M. de Grancour.

'Gentlemen, religion must not be vanquished,' cried the Bishop. 'The more attention is attracted to this affair, the more determined am I to secure a signal triumph. The Church is passing through a difficult crisis. Miracles are called for here among an industrial population, where sedition has spread itself and taken root far and wide; where religious and monarchical doctrines are regarded with a critical spirit; where nothing is respected by a system of analysis derived from Protestantism by the so-called Liberalism of to-day, which is free to take another name to-morrow. Go to M. de Granville, gentlemen, he is with us heart and soul; tell him that we ask for a few days' respite. I will go to see the unhappy man.'

'You, my lord!' cried the Abbé de Rastignac. 'Will not too much be compromised if *you* fail? You should only go when success is assured.'

'If my Lord Bishop will permit me to give my opinion,' said the Abbé Dutheil, 'I think that I can suggest a means of securing the triumph of religion under these melancholy circumstances.'

The Bishop's response was a somewhat cool sign of assent, which showed how low his vicar-general's credit stood with him.

'If any one has any ascendency over this rebellious soul, and may bring it to God, it is M. Bonnet, the curé of the village where the man was born,' the Abbé Dutheil went on.

'One of your protégés,' remarked the Bishop.

'My lord, M. Bonnet is one of those who recommend themselves by their militant virtues and evangelical labours.'

This answer, so modest and simple, was received with a silence which would have disconcerted any one but the Abbé Dutheil. He had alluded to merits which had been overlooked, and the three who heard him chose to regard the words as one of the meek sarcasms, neatly put, impossible to resent, in which churchmen excel, accustomed as they are by their training to say the thing they mean without transgressing the severe rules laid down for them in the least particular. But it was nothing of the kind; the Abbe never thought of himself. Then—

'I have heard of Saint Aristides for too long,' the Bishop made answer, smiling. 'If I were to leave his light under a bushel, it would be injustice or prejudice on my part. Your Liberals cry up your M. Bonnet as if he were one of themselves; I mean to see this rural apostle and judge for myself. Go to the public prosecutor, gentlemen, and ask him in my name for a respite; I will await his answer before despatching our well-beloved Abbé Gabriel to Montégnac to fetch the holy man for us. We will put his Beatitude in the way of working a miracle . . .'

The Abbé Dutheil flushed red at these words from the prelate-noble, but he chose to disregard any slight that they might contain for him. Both vicars-general silently took their leave, and left the Bishop alone with his young friend.

'The secrets of the confessional which we require lie buried there, no doubt,' said the Bishop, pointing to the shadows of the poplars where they reached a lonely house half-way between the island and the Faubourg Saint-Étienne.

'So I have always thought,' Gabriel answered. 'I am not a judge, and I do not care to play the spy; but if I had been the examining magistrate, I should know the name of the woman who is trembling now at every sound, at every word that is uttered, compelled all the while to wear a smooth, unclouded brow under pain of accompanying the condemned man to his death. Yet she has nothing to fear. I have seen the man—he will carry the secret of his passionate love to his grave.'

'Crafty young man!' said the Bishop, pinching his secretary's ear, as he pointed out a spot between the island in the river and the Faubourg Saint-Étienne, lit up by a last red ray from the sunset. The young priest's eyes had been fixed on it as he spoke. 'Justice ought to have searched there; is it not so?'

'I went to see the criminal to try the effect of my guess upon him; but he is watched by spies, and if I had spoken audibly, I might have compromised the woman for whom he is dying.'

'Let us keep silence,' said the Bishop. 'We are not concerned with man's justice. One head will fall, and that is enough. Besides, sooner or later, the secret will return to the Church.'

The perspicacity of the priest, fostered by the habit of meditation, is far keener than the insight of the lawyer and the detective. After all the preliminary investigations, after the legal inquiry, and the trial at the Assizes, the Bishop and his secretary, looking down from the height of the terrace, had in truth, by dint of contemplation, succeeded in discovering details as yet unknown.

M. de Granville was playing his evening game of whist in Mme. Graslin's house, and his visitors were

obliged to wait for his return. It was near midnight before his decision was known at the palace, and by two o'clock in the morning the Abbé Gabriel started out for Montégnac in the Bishop's own travelling carriage, lent to him for the occasion. The place is about nine leagues distant from Limoges; it lies under the mountains of the Corrèze, in that part of Limousin which borders on the department of the Creuse. All Limoges, when the Abbé left it, was in a ferment of excitement over the execution promised for this day, an expectation destined to be balked once more.

III

THE CURÉ OF MONTÉGNAC

In priests and fanatics there is a certain tendency to insist upon the very utmost to which they are legally entitled where their interests are concerned. Is this a result of poverty? Is an egoism which favours the development of greed one of the consequences of isolation upon a man's character? Or are shrewd business habits, as well as parsimony, acquired by a course of management of charitable funds? Each temperament suggests a different explanation, but the fact remains the same whether it lurks (as not seldom happens) beneath urbane good-humour, or (and equally often) is openly manifested; and the difficulty of putting the hand in the pocket is evidently increasingly felt on a journey.

Gabriel de Rastignac, the prettiest young gentleman who had bowed his head before the altar of the tabernacle for some time, only gave thirty sous to the postillions, and travelled slowly accordingly. The postillion tribe drive with all due respect a bishop who does but pay twice the amount demanded of ordinary mortals,

but, at the same time, they are careful not to damage the episcopal equipage, for fear of getting themselves into trouble. The Abbé, travelling alone for the first time in his life, spoke mildly at each relay—

'Just drive on a little faster, can't you.'

'You can't get the whip to work without a little palm oil,' an old postillion replied, and the young Abbé, much mystified, fell back in a corner of the carriage. He amused himself by watching the landscape through which they were travelling, and walked up a hill now and again on the winding road from Bordeaux to Lyon.

Five leagues beyond Limoges the country changes. You have left behind the charming low hills about the Vienne and the fair meadow slopes of Limousin, which sometimes (and this particularly about Saint-Léonard) put you in mind of Switzerland. You find yourself in a wilder and sterner district. Wide moors, vast steppes without grass or herds of horses, stretch away to the mountains of the Corrèze on the horizon. The far-off hills do not tower above the plain, a grandly rent wall of rock like the Alps in the south; you look in vain for the desolate peaks and glowing gorges of the Apennine, or for the majesty of the Pyrenees—the curving wave-like swell of the hills of the Corrèze bears witness to their origin, to the peaceful slow subsidence of the waters which once overwhelmed this country.

These undulations, characteristic of this, and, indeed, of most of the hill districts of France, have perhaps contributed quite as much as the climate to gain for the land its title of 'the kindly,' which Europe has confirmed. But it is a dreary transition country which separates Limousin from the provinces of Marche and Auvergne. In the mind of the poet and thinker who crosses it, it calls up visions of the Infinite (a terrible thought for certain souls); a woman looking out on its monotonous sameness is driven to muse; and to those who must dwell with the wilderness, nature shows herself stubborn,

peevish, and barren ; 'tis a churlish soil that covers these wide grey plains.

Only the neighbourhood of a great capital can work such a miracle as transformed Brie during the last two centuries. Here there is no large settlement which sometimes puts life into the waste lands which the agricultural economist regards as blanks in creation, spots where civilisation groans aghast, and the tourist finds no inns and a total absence of that picturesque in which he delights.

But to lofty spirits the moors, the shadows needed in the vast picture of nature, are not repellent. In our own day, Fenimore Cooper, owner of so melancholy a talent, has set forth the mysterious charm of great solitudes magnificently in *The Prairie*. But the wastes shunned by every form of plant life, the barren soil covered with loose stones and water-borne pebbles, the 'bad lands' of the earth—are so many challenges to civilisation. France must face her difficulties and find a solution for them, as the British are doing ; their patient heroism is turning the most barren heather land in Scotland into productive farms. Left to their primitive desolation, these fallows produce a crop of discouragement, of idleness, of poor physique from insufficient food, and crime, whenever want grows too clamorous. In these few words, you have the past history of Montégnac.

What is there to be done when a waste on so vast a scale is neglected by the administration, deserted by the nobles, execrated by workers ? Its inhabitants declare war against a social system which refuses to do its duty, and so it was in former times with the folk of Montégnac. They lived, like Highlanders, by murder and rapine. At sight of that country a thoughtful observer could readily imagine how that only twenty years ago the people of the village were at war with society at large.

The wide plateau, cut away on one side by the

Vienne, on another by the lovely valleys of Marche, bounded by Auvergne to the east, and shut in by the mountains of the Corrèze on the south, is very much like (agriculture apart) the uplands of Beauce, which separate the basin of the Loire from the basin of the Seine, or the plateaux of Touraine or of Berri, or many others of these facets, as it were, on the surface of France, so numerous that they demand the careful attention of the greatest administrators.

It is an unheard-of thing that while people complain that the masses are discontented with their condition, and constantly aspiring towards social elevation, a government cannot find a remedy for this in a country like France, where statistics show that there are millions of acres of land lying idle, and in some cases (as in Berri) covered with leaf mould seven or eight feet thick! A good deal of this land which should support whole villages, and yield a magnificent return to cultivation, is the property of pig-headed communes which refuse to sell to speculators because, forsooth, they wish to preserve the right of grazing some hundred cows upon it. Impotence is writ large over all these lands without a purpose. Yet every bit of land will grow some special thing, and neither arms nor will to work are lacking, but administrative ability and conscience.

Hitherto the upland districts of France have been sacrificed to the valleys. The Government has given its fostering protection to districts well able to take care of themselves. But most of these unlucky wastes have no water supply, the first requisite for cultivation. The mists which might fertilise the grey dead soil by depositing their oxides are swept across them by the wind. There are no trees to arrest the clouds and suck up their nourishing moisture. A few plantations here and there would be a godsend in such places. The poor folk who live in these wilds, at a practically impossible distance from the nearest large town, are

without a market for their produce—if they have any. Scattered about on the edges of a forest left to nature, they pick up their firewood and eke out a precarious existence by poaching; in the winter starvation stares them in the face. They have not capital enough to grow wheat, for so poor are they that ploughs and cattle are beyond their means; and they live on chestnuts. If you have wandered through some Natural History Museum and felt the indescribable depression which comes on after a prolonged study of the unvarying brown hues of the European specimens, you will perhaps understand how the perpetual contemplation of the grey plains must affect the moral conditions of the people who live face to face with such disheartening sterility. There is no shadow, nor contrast, nor coolness; no sight to stir associations which gladden the mind. One could hail a stunted crab-tree there as a friend.

The high road forked at length, and a cross road branched off towards the village a few leagues distant. Montégnac lying (as its name indicates) at the foot of a ridge of hill is the chief village of a canton on the borders of Haute-Vienne. The hillside above belongs to the township which encircles hill country and plain; indeed, the commune is a miniature Scotland, and has its Highlands and its Lowlands. Only a league away, at the back of the hill which shelters the township, rises the first peak of the chain of the Corrèze, and all the country between is filled by the great Forest of Montégnac, crowning the slope above the village, covering the little valleys and bleak undulating land (left bare in patches here and there), climbing the peak itself, stretching away to the north in a long narrow strip which ends abruptly in a point on a steep bank above the Aubusson road. That bit of steep bank rises above a deep hollow through which the high road runs from Lyons to Bordeaux. Many a time coaches and foot-passengers have been stopped in the darkest part of the dangerous ravine; and the robberies

nearly always went without punishment. The situation favoured the highwaymen, who escaped by paths well known to them into their forest fastnesses. In such a country the investigations of justice find little trace. People accordingly shunned that route.

Without traffic neither commerce nor industry can exist; the exchange of intellectual and material wealth becomes impossible. The visible wonders of civilisation are in all cases the result of the application of ideas as old as man. A thought in the mind of man—that is from age to age the starting-point and the goal of all our civilisation. The history of Montégnac is a proof of this axiom of social science. When the administration found itself in a position to consider the pressing practical needs of the country, the strip of forest was felled, gendarmes were posted to accompany the diligence through the two stages; but, to the shame of the gendarmerie be it said, it was not the sword but a voice, not Corporal Chervin but Parson Bonnet, who won the battle of civilisation by reforming the lives of the people. The curé, seized with pity and compassion for those poor souls, tried to regenerate them, and persevered till he gained his end.

After another hour's journey across the plains where flints succeeded to dust, and dust to flints, and flocks of partridges abode in peace, rising at the approach of the carriage with a heavy whirring sound of their wings, the Abbé Gabriel, like most other travellers who pass that way, hailed the sight of the roofs of the township with a certain pleasure. As you enter Montégnac you are confronted by one of the queer post-houses, not to be found out of France. The signboard, nailed up with four nails above a sorry empty stable, is a rough oaken plank on which a pretentious postillion has carved an inscription, darkening the letters with ink: *Pauste o chevos* it runs. The door is nearly always wide open. The threshold is a plank set up edgewise in the earth to keep

the rain-water out of the stable, the floor being below the level of the road outside. Within, the traveller sees to his sorrow the harness, worn, mildewed, mended with string, ready to give way at the first tug. The horses are probably not to be seen; they are at work on the land, or out at grass, anywhere and everywhere but in the stable. If by any chance they are within, they are feeding. If the horses are ready, the postillion has gone to see his aunt or his cousin, or gone to sleep, or he is getting in his hay. Nobody knows where he is; you must wait while somebody goes to find him. He does not stir until he has a mind; and when he comes, it takes him an eternity to find his waistcoat or his whip, or to rub down his cattle. The buxom dame in the doorstep fidgets about even more restlessly than the traveller, and forestalls any outburst on his part by bestirring herself a good deal more quickly than the horses. She personates the post-mistress whose husband is out in the fields.

It was in such a stable as this that the Bishop's favourite left his travelling carriage. The walls looked like maps; the thatched roof, as gay with flowers as a garden bed, bent under the weight of its growing houseleeks. He asked the woman of the place to have everything in readiness for his departure in an hour's time, and inquired his way to the parsonage of her. The good woman pointed out a narrow alley between two houses. That was the way to the church, she said, and he would find the parsonage hard by.

While the Abbé climbed the steep path paved with cobble-stones between the hedgerows on either side, the post-mistress fell to questioning the post-boy. Every post-boy along the road from Limoges had passed on to his brother whip the surmises of the first postillion concerning the Bishop's intentions. So while Limoges was turning out of bed and talking of the execution of old Pingret's murderer, the country folk all along the

road were spreading the news of the pardon procured by the Bishop for the innocent prisoner, and prattling of supposed miscarriages of justice, insomuch, that when Jean-François came to the scaffold at a later day, he was like to be regarded as a martyr.

The Abbé Gabriel went some few paces along the footpath, red with autumn leaves, dark with blackberries and sloes; then he turned and stood, acting on the instinct which prompts us to make a survey of any strange place, an instinct which we share with the horse and dog. The reason of the choice of the site of Montégnac was apparent; several streams broke out of the hillside, and a small river flowed along by the departmental road which leads from the township to the prefecture. Like the rest of the villages in this plateau, Montégnac is built of blocks of clay, dried in the sun; if a fire broke out in a cottage, it is possible that it might find it earth and leave it brick. The roofs are of thatch; altogether, it was a poor-looking place that the Bishop's messenger saw. Below Montégnac lay fields of rye, potatoes, and turnips, land won from the plain. In the meadows on the lowest slope of the hillside, watered by artificial channels, were some of the celebrated breed of Limousin horses; a legacy (so it is said) of the Arab invaders of France, who crossed the Pyrenees to meet death from the battle-axes of Charles Martel's Franks, between Poitiers and Tours. Up above on the heights the soil looked parched. Now and again the reddish scorched surface, burnt bare by the sun, indicated the arid soil which the chestnuts love. The water, thriftily distributed along the irrigation channels, was only sufficient to keep the meadows fresh and green; on these hillsides grows the fine short grass, the delicate sweet pasture that builds you up a breed of horses delicate and impatient of control, fiery, but not possessed of much staying-power; unexcelled in their native district, but apt to change their character when they change their country.

Some young mulberry trees indicated an intention of growing silk. Like most villages, Montégnac could only boast a single street, to wit, the road that ran through it; but there was an Upper and Lower Montégnac on either side of it, each cut in two by a little pathway running at right angles to the road. The hillside below a row of houses on the ridge was gay with terraced gardens which rose from a level of several feet above the road, necessitating flights of steps, sometimes of earth, sometimes paved with cobble-stones. A few old women, here and there, who sat spinning or looking after the children, put some human interest into the picture, and kept up a conversation between Upper and Lower Montégnac by talking to each other across the road, usually quiet enough. In this way news travelled pretty quickly from one end of the township to the other. The gardens were full of fruit-trees, cabbages, onions, and pot herbs; beehives stood in rows along the terraces.

A second parallel row of cottages lay below the road, their gardens sloping down towards the little river which flowed through fields of thick-growing hemp, the fruit-trees which love damp places marking its course. A few cottages, the post-house among them, nestled in a hollow, a situation well adapted for the weavers who lived in them, and almost every house was overshadowed by the walnut-trees, which flourish best in heavy soil. At the further end of Montégnac, and on the same side of the road, stood a house larger and more carefully kept than the rest; it was the largest of a group equally neat in appearance, a little hamlet in fact separated from the township by its gardens, and known then, as to-day, by the name of 'Tascherons'.' The commune was not much in itself, but some thirty outlying farms belonged to it. In the valley, several 'water-lanes' like those in Berri and Marche marked out the course of the little streams with green fringes. The

whole commune looked like a green ship in the midst of a wide sea.

Whenever a house, a farm, a village, or a district passes from a deplorable state to a more satisfactory condition of things, though as yet scarcely to be called strikingly prosperous, the life there seems so much a matter of course, so natural, that at first sight a spectator can never guess how much toil went to the founding of that not extraordinary prosperity; what an amount of effort, vast in proportion to the strength that undertook it; what heroic persistence lies there buried and out of sight, effort and persistence without which the visible changes could not have taken place. So the young Abbé saw nothing unusual in the pleasant view before his eyes; he little knew what that country had been before M. Bonnet came to it.

He turned and went a few paces further up the path, and soon came in sight of the church and parsonage, about six hundred feet above the gardens of Upper Montégnac. Both buildings, when first seen in the distance, were hard to distinguish among the ivy-covered stately ruins of the old Castle of Montégnac, a stronghold of the Navarreins in the twelfth century. The parsonage house had every appearance of being built in the first instance for a steward or head gamekeeper. It stood at the end of a broad terrace planted with lime-trees, and overlooked the whole country-side. The ravages of time bore witness to the antiquity of the flights of steps and the walls which supported the terrace, the stones had been forced out of place by the constant imperceptible thrusting of plant life in the crevices, until tall grasses and wild flowers had taken root among them. Every step was covered with a dark-green carpet of fine close moss. The masonry, solid though it was, was full of rifts and cracks, where wild plants of the pellitory and camomile tribe were growing; the maidenhair fern sprang from the loopholes in thick masses of

shaded green. The whole face of the wall, in fact, was hung with the finest and fairest tapestry, damasked with bracken fronds, purple snap-dragons with their golden stamens, blue borage, and brown fern and moss, till the stone itself was only seen by glimpses here and there through its moist, cool covering.

Up above, upon the terrace, the clipped box borders formed geometrical patterns in a pleasure garden framed by the parsonage house, and behind the parsonage rose the crags, a pale background of rock, on which a few drooping, feathery trees struggled to live. The ruins of the castle towered above the house and the church.

The parsonage itself, built of flints and mortar, boasted a single story and garrets above, apparently empty, to judge by the dilapidated windows in either gable under the high-pitched roof. A couple of rooms on the ground floor, separated by a passage with a wooden staircase at the further end of it, two more rooms on the second floor, and a little lean-to kitchen built against the side of the house in the yard, where a stable and coach-house stood perfectly empty, useless, abandoned—this was all. The kitchen garden lay between the house and the church; a ruinous covered passage led from the parsonage to the sacristy.

The young Abbé's eyes wandered over the place. He noted the four windows with their leaded panes, the brown moss-grown walls, the rough wooden door, so full of splits and cracks that it looked like a bundle of matches, and the adorable quaintness of it all by no means took his fancy. The grace of the plant life which covered the roofs, the wild climbing flowers that sprang from the rotting wooden sills and cracks in the wall, the trails and tendrils of the vines, covered with tiny clusters of grapes, which found their way in through the windows, as if they were fain to carry merriment and laughter into the house,—all this he beheld, and thanked

his stars that his way led to a bishopric, and not to a country parsonage.

The house, open all day long, seemed to belong to every one. The Abbé Gabriel walked into the dining-room, which opened into the kitchen. The furniture which met his eyes was poor—an old oak table with four twisted legs, an easy-chair covered with tapestry, a few wooden chairs, and an old chest, which did duty as a sideboard. There was no one in the kitchen except the cat, the sign of a woman in the house. The other room was the parlour; glancing round it, the young priest noticed that the easy-chairs were made of unpolished wood, and covered with tapestry. The panelling of the walls, like the rafters, was of chestnut wood, and black as ebony. There was a timepiece in a green case painted with flowers, a table covered with a worn green cloth, one or two chairs, and on the mantelshelf an Infant Jesus in wax under a glass shade set between two candlesticks. The hearth, surrounded by a rough wooden moulding, was hidden by a paper screen representing the Good Shepherd with a sheep on his shoulder. In this way, doubtless, one of the family of the mayor, or of the justice of the peace, endeavoured to express his acknowledgments of the care bestowed on his training.

The state of the house was something piteous. The walls, which had once been limewashed, were discoloured here and there, and rubbed and darkened up to the height of a man's head. The wooden staircase, with its heavy balustrades, neatly kept though it was, looked as though it must totter if any one set foot on it. At the end of the passage, just opposite the front door, another door stood open, giving the Abbé Gabriel an opportunity of surveying the kitchen garden, shut in by the wall of the old rampart, built of the white crumbling stone of the district. Fruit-trees in full bearing had been trained espalier-fashion along this side of the garden, but the

long trellises were falling to pieces, and the vine-leaves were covered with blight.

The Abbé went back through the house, and walked along the paths in the front garden. Down below the magnificent wide view of the valley was spread out before his eyes, a sort of oasis on the edge of the great plain, which, in the light morning mists, looked something like a waveless sea. Behind, and rather to one side, the great forest stretched away to the horizon, the bronzed mass making a contrast with the plains, and on the other hand the church and the castle perched on the crag stood sharply out against the blue sky. As the Abbé Gabriel paced the tiny paths among the box-edged diamonds, circles, and stars, crunching the gravel beneath his boots, he looked from point to point at the scene; over the village, where already a few groups of gazers had formed to stare at him, at the valley in the morning light, the quick-set hedges that marked the ways, the little river flowing under its willows, in such contrast with the infinite of the plains. Gradually his impressions changed the current of his thoughts. He admired the quietness, he felt the influences of the pure air, of the peace inspired by a glimpse of a life of Biblical simplicity; and with these came a dim sense of the beauty of that life. He went back again to look at its details with a more serious curiosity.

A little girl, left in charge of the house no doubt, but busy pilfering in the garden, came back at the sound of a man's shoes creaking on the flagged pavement of the ground-floor rooms. In her confusion at being caught with fruit in her hand and between her teeth, she made no answer whatever to the questions put to her by this Abbé—young, handsome, daintily arrayed. The child had never believed it possible that such an Abbé could exist—radiant in fine lawn, neat as a new pin, and dressed in fine black cloth without a speck or a crease.

'M. Bonnet?' she echoed at last. 'M. Bonnet is saying mass, and Mlle. Ursule is gone to the church.'

The covered passage from the house to the sacristy had escaped the Abbé Gabriel's notice; so he went down the path again to enter the church by the principal door. The church porch was a sort of pent-house facing the village, set at the top of a flight of worn and disjointed steps, overlooking a square below; planted with the great elm-trees which date from the time of the Protestant Sully, and full of channels washed by the rains.

The church itself, one of the poorest in France, where churches are sometimes very poor, was not unlike those huge barns which boast a roof above the door, supported by brick pillars or tree trunks. Like the parsonage house, it was built of rubble, the square tower being roofed with round tiles; but Nature had covered the bare walls with the richest tracery mouldings, and made them fairer still with colour and light and shade, carving her lines and disposing her masses, showing all the craftsman's cunning of a Michel Angelo in her work. The ivy clambered over both sides, its sinewy stems clung to the walls till they were covered, beneath the green leaves, with as many veins as any anatomical diagram. Under this mantle, wrought by Time to hide the wounds which Time had made, damasked by autumn flowers that grew in the crevices, nestled the singing-birds. The rose window in the west front was bordered with blue harebells, like the first page of some richly painted missal. There were fewer flowers on the north side, which communicated with the parsonage, though even there there were patches of crimson moss on the grey stone, but the south wall and the apse were covered with many-coloured blossoms; there were a few saplings rooted in the cracks, notably an almond-tree, the symbol of Hope. Two giant firs grew up close to the wall of the apse, and served as lightning-conductors. A low ruinous wall repaired and maintained at elbow height

with fallen fragments of its own masonry ran round the churchyard. In the midst of the space stood an iron cross mounted on a stone pedestal, strewn with sprigs of box blessed at Easter, a reminder of a touching Christian rite, now fallen into disuse except in country places. Only in little villages and hamlets does the priest go at Eastertide to bear to his dead the tidings of the Resurrection—'You shall live again in happiness.' Here and there above the grass-covered graves rose a rotten wooden cross.

The inside was in every way in keeping with the picturesque neglect outside of the poor church, where all the ornament had been given by Time, grown charitable for once. Within, your eyes turned at once to the roof. It was lined with chestnut wood and sustained at equal distances by strong king-posts set on cross beams; age had imparted to it the richest tones which old woods can take in Europe. The four walls were lime-washed and bare of ornament. Poverty had made unconscious Iconoclasts of these worshippers.

Four pointed windows in the side walls let in the light through their leaded panes; the floor was of brick; the seats, wooden benches. The tomb-shaped altar bore for ornament a great crucifix, beneath which stood a tabernacle in walnut wood (its mouldings brightly polished and clean), eight candlesticks (the candles thriftily made of painted wood), and a couple of china vases full of artificial flowers, things that a broker's man would have declined to look at, but which must serve for God. The lamp in the shrine was simply a floating-light, like a night-light, set in an old silver-plated holy water stoup, hung from the ceiling by silken cords brought from the wreck of some château. The baptismal fonts were of wood like the pulpit, and a sort of cage where the churchwardens sat—the patricians of the place. The shrine in the Lady Chapel offered to the admiration of the public two coloured lithographs framed

in a narrow gilded frame. The altar had been painted white, and adorned with artificial flowers planted in gilded wooden flower-pots set out on a white altar-cloth edged with shabby yellowish lace.

But at the end of the church a long window covered with a red cotton curtain produced a magical effect. The lime-washed walls caught a faint rose tint from that glowing crimson; it was as if some thought Divine shone from the altar to fill the poor place with warmth and light. On one wall of the passage which led into the sacristy the patron saint of the village had been carved in wood and painted—a St. John the Baptist and his sheep, an execrable daub. Yet in spite of the bareness and poverty of the church, there was about the whole a subdued harmony which appeals to those whose spirits have been finely touched, a harmony of visible and invisible emphasised by the colouring. The rich dark-brown tints of the wood made an admirable relief to the pure white of the walls, and both blended with the triumphant crimson of the chancel window, an austere trinity of colour which recalled the great doctrine of the Catholic Church.

If surprise was the first feeling called forth by the sight of this miserable house of God, pity and admiration followed quickly upon it. Did it not express the poverty of those who worshipped there? Was it not in keeping with the quaint simplicity of the parsonage? And it was clean and carefully kept. You breathed, as it were, an atmosphere of the simple virtues of the fields; nothing within spoke of neglect. Primitive and homely though it was, it was clothed in prayer; a soul pervaded it which you felt, though you could not explain how.

The Abbé Gabriel slipped in softly, so as not to interrupt the meditations of two groups on the front benches before the high-altar, which was railed off from the nave by a balustrade of the inevitable chestnut wood, roughly made enough, and covered with a white

cloth for the Communion. Just above the space hung the lamp. Some score of peasant folk on either side were so deeply absorbed in passionate prayer, that they paid no heed to the stranger as he walked up the church in the narrow gangway between the rows of benches. As the Abbé Gabriel stood beneath the lamp, he could see into the two chancels which completed the cross of the ground-plan; one of them led to the sacristy, the other to the churchyard. It was in this latter, near the graves, that a whole family clad in black were kneeling on the brick floor, for there were no benches in this part of the church. The Abbé bent before the altar on the step of the balustrade and knelt to pray, giving a side glance at this sight, which was soon explained. The Gospel was read; the curé took off his chasuble and came down from the altar towards the railing; and the Abbé, who had foreseen this, slipped away and stood close to the wall before M. Bonnet could see him. The clock struck ten.

'My brethren,' said the curé in a faltering voice, 'even at this moment, a child of this parish is paying his forfeit to man's justice by submitting to its extreme penalty. We offer the holy sacrifice of the mass for the repose of his soul. Let us all pray together to God to beseech Him not to forsake that child in his last moments, to entreat that repentance here on earth may find in Heaven the mercy which has been refused to it here below. The ruin of this unhappy child, on whom we had counted most surely to set a good example, can only be attributed to a lapse from religious principles——'

The curé was interrupted by the sound of sobbing from the group of mourners in the transept; and by the paroxysm of grief the young priest knew that this was the Tascheron family, though he had never seen them before. The two foremost among them were old people of seventy years at least. Their faces, swarthy as a

Florentine bronze, were covered with deep impassive lines. Both of them, in their old patched garments, stood like statues close against the wall; evidently this was the condemned man's grandfather and grandmother. Their red glassy eyes seemed to shed tears of blood; the old arms trembled so violently that the sticks on which they leant made a faint sound of scratching on the bricks. Behind them the father and mother, their faces hidden in their handkerchiefs, burst into tears. About the four heads of the family knelt two married daughters with their husbands, then three sons, stupefied with grief. Five kneeling little ones, the oldest not more than seven years of age, understood nothing probably of all that went on, but looked and listened with the apparently torpid curiosity, which in the peasant is often a process of observation carried (so far as the outward and visible is concerned) to the highest possible pitch. Last of all came the poor girl Denise, who had been imprisoned by justice, the martyr to sisterly love; she was listening with an expression which seemed to betoken incredulity and straying thoughts. To her it seemed impossible that her brother should die. Her face was a wonderful picture of another face, that of one among the three Maries who could not believe that Christ was dead, though she had shared the agony of His Passion. Pale and dry-eyed, as is the wont of those who have watched for many nights, her freshness had been withered more by sorrow than by work in the fields; but she still kept the beauty of a country girl, the full plump figure, the shapely red arms, a perfectly round face, and clear eyes, glittering at that moment with the light of despair in them. Her throat, firm-fleshed and white below the line of sunburned brown, indicated the rich tissue and fairness of the skin beneath the stuff. The two married daughters were weeping; their husbands, patient tillers of the soil, were grave and sad. None of the three sons in their sorrow raised their eyes from the ground.

Only Denise and her mother showed any sign of rebellion in the harrowing picture of resignation and despairing anguish. The sympathy and sincere and pious commiseration felt by the rest of the villagers for a family so much respected had lent the same expression to all faces, an expression which became a look of positive horror when they gathered from the curé's words that even in that moment the knife would fall. All of them had known the young man from the day of his birth, and doubtless all of them believed him to be incapable of committing the crime laid to his charge. The sobbing which broke in upon the simple and brief address grew so vehement that the curé's voice suddenly ceased, and he invited those present to fervent prayer.

There was nothing in this scene to surprise a priest, but Gabriel de Rastignac was too young not to feel deeply moved by it. He had not as yet put priestly virtues in practice; he knew that a different destiny lay before him; that it would never be his duty to go forth into the social breaches where the heart bleeds at the sight of suffering on every side; his lot would be cast among the upper ranks of the clergy which keep alive the spirit of sacrifice, represent the highest intelligence of the Church, and, when occasion calls for it, display these same virtues of the village curé on the largest scale, like the great Bishops of Marseilles and Meaux, the Archbishops of Arles and Cambrai. The poor peasants were praying and weeping for one who (as they believed) was even then going to his death in a great public square, before a crowd of people assembled from all parts to see him die, the agony of death made intolerable for him by the weight of shame; there was something very touching in this feeble counterpoise of sympathy and prayer from a few, opposed to the cruel curiosity of the rabble and the curses, not undeserved. The poor church heightened the pathos of the contrast.

The Abbé Gabriel was tempted to go over to the

Tascherons and cry, 'Your son, your brother has been reprieved!' but he shrank from interrupting the mass; he knew, moreover, that it was only a reprieve, the execution was sure to take place sooner or later. But he could not follow the service; in spite of himself, he began to watch the pastor of whom the miracle of conversion was expected.

Out of the indications in the parsonage house, Gabriel de Rastignac had drawn a picture of M. Bonnet in his own mind: he would be short and stout, he thought, with a red powerful face, a rough working man, almost like one of the peasants themselves, and tanned by the sun. The reality was very far from this; the Abbé Gabriel found himself in the presence of an equal. M. Bonnet was short, slender, and weakly-looking; yet it was none of these characteristics, but an impassioned face, such a face as we imagine for an apostle, which struck you at a first glance. In shape it was almost triangular; starting from the temples on either side of a broad forehead, furrowed with wrinkles, the meagre outlines of the hollow cheeks met at a point in the chin. In that face, overcast by an ivory tint like the wax of an altar candle, blazed two blue eyes, full of the light of faith and the fires of a living hope. A long slender, straight nose divided it into two equal parts. The wide mouth spoke even when the full, resolute lips were closed, and the voice which issued thence was one of those which go to the heart. The chestnut hair, thin, smooth, and fine, denoted a poor physique, poorly nourished. The whole strength of the man lay in his will. Such were his personal characteristics. In any other such short hands might have indicated a bent towards material pleasures; perhaps he too, like Socrates, had found evil in his nature to subdue. His thinness was ungainly, his shoulders protruded too much, and he seemed to be knock-kneed; his bust was so over developed in comparison with his limbs, that it gave him something of the appearance of a

hunchback without the actual deformity; altogether, to an ordinary observer, his appearance was not prepossessing. Only those who know the miracles of thought and faith and art can recognise and reverence the light that burns in a martyr's eyes, the pallor of steadfastness, the voice of love,—all traits of the Curé Bonnet. Here was a man worthy of that early Church which no longer exists save in the pages of the *Martyrology* and in pictures of the sixteenth century; he bore unmistakably the seal of human greatness which most nearly approaches the Divine; conviction had set its mark on him, and a conviction brings a salient indefinable beauty into faces made of the commonest human clay; the devout worshipper at any shrine reflects something of its golden glow, even as the glory of a noble love shines like a sort of light from a woman's face. Conviction is human will come to its full strength; and being at once the cause and the effect, conviction impresses the most indifferent, it is a kind of mute eloquence which gains a hold upon the masses.

As the curé came down from the altar, his eyes fell on the Abbé Gabriel, whom he recognised; but when the Bishop's secretary appeared in the sacristy, he found no one there but Ursule. Her master had already given his orders. Ursule, a woman of canonical age, asked the Abbé de Rastignac to follow her along the passage through the garden.

'Monsieur le Curé told me to ask you whether you had breakfasted, sir,' she said. 'You must have started out from Limoges very early this morning to be here by ten o'clock, so I will set about getting breakfast ready. Monsieur l'Abbé will not find the Bishop's table here, but we will do our best. M. Bonnet will not be long; he has gone to comfort those poor souls—the Tascherons. Something very terrible is happening to-day to one of their sons.'

'But where do the poor people live?' the Abbé Gabriel put in at length. 'I must take M. Bonnet

back to Limoges with me at once by the Bishop's orders. The unhappy man is not to be executed to-day; his lordship has obtained a reprieve——'

'Ah!' cried Ursule, her tongue itching to spread the news. 'There will be plenty of time to take that comfort to the poor things whilst I am getting breakfast ready. The Taschérons live at the other end of the village. You follow the path under the terrace, that will take you to the house.'

As soon as the Abbé Gabriel was fairly out of sight, Ursule went down to take the tidings to the village herself, and to obtain the things needed for breakfast.

The curé had learned, for the first time, at the church of a desperate resolve on the part of the Taschérons, made since the appeal had been rejected. They would leave the district; they had already sold all they had, and that very morning the money was to be paid down. Formalities and unforeseen delays had retarded the sale; they had been forced to stay in the countryside after Jean François was condemned, and every day had been for them a cup of bitterness to drink. The news of the plan, carried out so secretly, had only transpired on the eve of the day fixed for the execution. The Taschérons had meant to leave the place before the fatal day; but the purchaser of their property was a stranger to the canton, a Corrézien to whom their motives were indifferent, and he on his own part had found some difficulty in getting the money together. So the family had endured the utmost of their misery. So strong was the feeling of their disgrace in these simple folk who had never tampered with conscience, that grandfather and grandmother, daughters and sons-in-law, father and mother, and all who bore the name of Taschéron, or were connected with them, were leaving the place. Every one in the commune was sorry that they should go, and the mayor had gone to the curé, entreating him to use his influence with the poor mourners.

As the law now stands, the father is no longer responsible for his son's crime, and the father's guilt does not attach to his children, a condition of things in keeping with other emancipations which have weakened the paternal power, and contributed to the triumph of that individualism which is eating the heart of society in our days. The thinker who looks to the future sees the extinction of the spirit of the family; those who drew up the new code have set in its place equality and independent opinion. The family will always be the basis of society; and now the family, as it used to be, exists no longer, it has come of necessity to be a temporary arrangement, continually broken up and reunited only to be separated again; the links between the future and the past are destroyed, the family of an older time has ceased to exist in France. Those who proceeded to the demolition of the old social edifice were logical when they decided that each member of the family should inherit equally, lessening the authority of the father, making of each child the head of a new household, suppressing great responsibilities; but is the social system thus re-edified as solid a structure, with its laws of yesterday unproved by long experience, as the old monarchy was in spite of its abuses? With the solidarity of the family, society has lost that elemental force which Montesquieu discovered and called 'honour.' Society has isolated its members the better to govern them, and has divided in order to weaken. The social system reigns over so many units, an aggregation of so many ciphers, piled up like grains of wheat in a heap. Can the general welfare take the place of the welfare of the family? Time holds the answer to this great enigma. And yet—the old order still exists, it is so deeply rooted that you find it most alive among the people. It is still an active force in remote districts where 'prejudice,' as it is called, likewise exists; in old-world nooks where all the members of a family suffer for

the crime of one, and the children for the sins of their fathers.

It was this belief which made their own countryside intolerable to the Tascherons. Their profoundly religious natures had brought them to the church that morning, for how was it possible to stay away when the mass was said for their son, and prayer offered that God might bring him to a repentance which should reopen eternal life to him? and, moreover, must they not take leave of the village altar? But, for all that, their plans were made; and when the curé, who followed them, entered the principal house, he found the bundles made up, ready for the journey. The purchaser was waiting with the money. The notary had just made out the receipt. Out in the yard, in front of the house, stood a country cart ready to take the old people and the money and Jean-François's mother. The rest of the family meant to set out on foot that night.

The young Abbé entered the room on the ground floor where the whole family were assembled, just as the curé of Montégnac had exhausted all his eloquence. The two old people seemed to have ceased to feel from excess of grief; they were crouching on their bundles in a corner of the room, gazing round them at the old house, which had been a family possession from father to son, at the familiar furniture, at the man who had bought it all, and then at each other, as who should say, 'Who would have thought that we should ever have come to this?' For a long time past the old people had resigned their authority to their son, the prisoner's father; and now, like old kings after their abdication, they played the passive part of subjects and children. Tascheron stood upright listening to the curé, to whom he gave answers in a deep voice by monosyllables. He was a man of forty-eight or thereabouts, with a fine face, such as served Titian for his apostles. It was a trustworthy face, gravely honest and thoughtful; a severe

profile, a nose at right angles with the brows, blue eyes, a noble forehead, regular features, dark crisped stubborn hair, growing in the symmetrical fashion which adds a charm to a visage bronzed by a life of work in the open air—this was the present head of the house. It was easy to see that the curé's arguments were shattered against that resolute will.

Denise was leaning against the bread hutch, watching the notary, who used it as a writing-table; they had given him the grandmother's armchair. The man who had bought the place sat beside the scrivener. The two married sisters were laying the cloth for the last meal which the old folk would offer or partake of in the old house and in their own country before they set out to live beneath alien skies. The men of the family half stood, half sat, propped against the large bedstead with the green serge curtains, while Tascheron's wife, their mother, was whisking an omelette by the fire. The grandchildren crowded about the doorway, and the purchaser's family were outside.

Out of the window you could see the garden, carefully cultivated, stocked with fruit-trees; the two old people had planted them—every one. Everything about them, like the old smoke-begrimed room with its black rafters, seemed to share in the pent-up sorrow, which could be read in so many different expressions on the different faces. The meal was being prepared for the notary, the purchaser, the children, and the men; neither the father, nor mother, nor Denise, nor her sisters, cared to satisfy their hunger, their hearts were too heavily oppressed. There was a lofty and heartrending resignation in this last performance of the duties of country hospitality—the Taschérons, men of an ancient stock, ended as people usually begin, by doing the honours of their house.

The Bishop's secretary was impressed by the scene, so simple and natural, yet so solemn, which met his eyes

as he came to summon the curé of Montégnac to do the Bishop's bidding.

'The good man's son is still alive,' Gabriel said, addressing the curé.

At the words, which every one heard in the prevailing silence, the two old people sprang to their feet as if the Trumpet had sounded for the Last Judgment. The mother dropped her frying-pan into the fire. A cry of joy broke from Denise. All the others seemed to be turned to stone in their dull amazement.

'*Jean-François is pardoned!*' The cry came at that moment as from one voice from the whole village, who rushed up to the Tascherons' house. 'It is his lordship the Bishop——

'I was *sure* of his innocence!' exclaimed the mother.

'The purchase holds good all the same, doesn't it?' asked the buyer, and the notary answered him by a nod.

In a moment the Abbé Gabriel became the point of interest, all eyes were fixed on him; his face was so sad, that it was suspected that there was some mistake, but he could not bear to correct it, and went out with the curé. Outside the house he dismissed the crowd by telling those who came round about him that there was no pardon, it was only a reprieve, and a dismayed silence at once succeeded to the clamour. Gabriel and the curé turned into the house again, and saw a look of anguish on all the faces—the sudden silence in the village had been understood.

'Jean-François has not received his pardon, my friends,' said the young Abbé, seeing that the blow had been struck, 'but my lord Bishop's anxiety for his soul is so great that he has put off the execution that your son may not perish to all eternity at least.'

'Then is he living?' cried Denise.

The Abbé took the curé aside and told him of his parishioner's impiety, of the consequent peril to religion,

and what it was that the Bishop expected of the curé of Montégnac.

'My lord Bishop requires my death,' returned the curé. 'Already I have refused to go to this unhappy boy when his afflicted family asked me. The meeting and the scene *there* afterwards would shatter me like a glass. Let every man do his work. The weakness of my system, or rather the over-sensitiveness of my nervous organisation, makes it out of the question for me to fulfil these duties of our ministry. I am still a country parson that I may serve my like, in a sphere where nothing more is demanded of me in a Christian life than I can accomplish. I thought very carefully over this matter, and tried to satisfy these good Taschérons, and to do my duty towards this poor boy of theirs; but at the bare thought of mounting the cart with him, the mere idea of being present while the preparations for death were being made, a deadly chill runs through my veins. No one would ask it of a mother; and remember, sir, that he is a child of my poor church——'

'Then you refuse to obey the Bishop's summons?' asked the Abbé Gabriel.

M. Bonnet looked at him.

'His lordship does not know the state of my health,' he said, 'nor does he know that my nature rises in revolt against——'

'There are times when, like Belzunce at Marseilles, we are bound to face a certain death,' the Abbé Gabriel broke in.

Just at that moment the curé felt that a hand pulled his cassock; he heard sobs, and, turning, saw the whole family on their knees. Old and young, parents and children, men and women, held out their hands to him imploringly; all the voices united in one cry as he showed his flushed face.

'Ah! save his soul at least!'

It was the old grandmother who had caught at

Ah! save his soul at least!'
Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher

the skirt of his cassock, and was bathing it with tears.

'I will obey, sir——' No sooner were the words uttered than the curé was forced to sit down; his knees trembled under him. The young secretary explained the nature of Jean-François's frenzy.

'Do you think that the sight of his younger sister might shake him?' he added, as he came to an end.

'Yes, certainly,' returned the curé.—'Denise, you will go with us.'

'So shall I,' said the mother.

'No!' shouted the father. 'That boy is dead to us. You know that. Not one of us shall see him.'

'Do not stand in the way of his salvation,' said the young Abbé. 'If you refuse us the means of softening him, you take the responsibility of his soul upon yourself. In his present state his death may reflect more discredit on his family than his life.'

'She shall go,' said the father. 'She always interfered when I tried to correct my son, and this shall be her punishment.'

The Abbé Gabriel and M. Bonnet went back together to the parsonage. It was arranged that Denise and her mother should be there at the time when the two ecclesiastics should set out for Limoges. As they followed the footpath along the outskirts of Upper Montégnac, the younger man had an opportunity of looking more closely than heretofore in the church at this country parson, so highly praised by the vicar-general. He was favourably impressed almost at once by his companion's simple dignified manners, by the magic of his voice, and by the words he spoke, in keeping with the voice. The curé had been but once to the palace since the Bishop had taken Gabriel de Rastignac as his secretary, so that he had scarcely seen the favourite destined to be a Bishop some day; he knew that the secretary had great influence, and yet in the

dignified kindness of his manner there was a certain independence, as of the curé whom the Church permits to be in some sort a sovereign in his own parish.

As for the young Abbé, his feelings were so far from appearing in his face that they seemed to have hardened it into severity; his expression was not chilly, it was glacial.

A man who could change the disposition and manners of a whole countryside necessarily possessed some faculty of observation, and was more or less of a physiognomist; and even had the curé been wise only in well-doing, he had just given proof of an unusually keen sensibility. The coolness with which the Bishop's secretary met his advances and responded to his friendliness struck him at once. He could only account for this reception by some secret dissatisfaction on the other's part, and looked back over his conduct, wondering how he could have given offence, and in what the offence lay. There was a short embarrassing silence, broken by the Abbé de Rastignac.

'You have a very poor church, Monsieur le Cure,' he remarked, aristocratic insolence in his tones and words.

'It is too small,' answered M. Bonnet. 'For great Church festivals the old people sit on benches round the porch, and the younger ones stand in a circle in the square down below; but they are so silent, that those outside can hear.'

Gabriel was silent for several moments.

'If the people are so devout, why do you leave the church so bare?' he asked at length.

'Alas! sir, I cannot bring myself to spend money on the building when the poor need it. The poor are the Church. Besides, I should not fear a visitation from my lord Bishop at the Fête-Dieu! Then the poor give the church such things as they have! Did you notice the nails along the walls? They fix a sort of wire trellis-work to them, which the women cover with bunches of flowers; the whole church is dressed in flowers, as it were,

which keep fresh till the evening. My poor church, which looked so bare to you, is adorned like a bride, and fragrant with sweet scents; the ground is strewn with leaves, and a path in the midst for the passage of the Holy Sacrament is carpeted with rose petals. For that one day I need not fear comparison with Saint Peter's at Rome. The Holy Father has his gold, and I my flowers; to each his miracle. Ah! the township of Montégnac is poor, but it is Catholic. Once upon a time they used to rob travellers, now any one who passes through the place might drop a bag full of money here, and he would find it when he returned home.'

'Such a result speaks strongly in your praise,' said Gabriel.

'I have had nothing to do with it,' answered the curé, flushing at this incisive epigram. 'It has been brought about by the Word of God and the sacramental bread.'

'Bread somewhat brown,' said the Abbé Gabriel, smiling.

'White bread is only suited to the rich,' said the curé humbly.

The Abbé took both M. Bonnet's hands in his, and grasped them cordially.

'Pardon me, Monsieur le Curé,' he said; and in a moment the reconciliation was completed by a look in the beautiful blue eyes that went to the depths of the curé's soul.

'My lord Bishop recommended me to put your patience and humility to the proof, but I can go no further. After this little while I see how greatly you have been wronged by the praises of the Liberal party.'

Breakfast was ready. Ursule had spread the white cloth, and set new-laid eggs, butter, honey and fruit, cream and coffee, among bunches of flowers on the old-fashioned table in the old-fashioned sitting-room. The window that looked out upon the terrace stood open, framed about with green leaves. Clematis grew about

the ledge—white starry blossoms, with tiny sheaves of golden crinkled stamens at their hearts to relieve the white. Jessamine climbed up one side of the window, and nasturtiums on the other; above it, a trail of vine, turning red even now, made a rich setting, which no sculptor could hope to render, so full of grace was that lace-work of leaves outlined against the sky.

'You will find life here reduced to its simplest terms,' said the curé, smiling, though his face did not belie the sadness of his heart. 'If we had known that you were coming—and who could have foreseen the events which have brought you here?—Ursule would have had some trout for you from the torrent; there is a trout-stream in the forest, and the fish are excellent; but I am forgetting that this is August, and that the Gabou will be dry! My head is very much confused——'

'Are you very fond of this place?' asked the Abbé.

'Yes. If God permits, I shall die curé of Montégnac. I could wish that other and distinguished men, who have thought to do better by becoming lay philanthropists, had taken this way of mine. Modern philanthropy is the bane of society; the principles of the Catholic religion are the one remedy for the evils which leaven the body social. Instead of describing the disease and making it worse by jeremiads, each one should have put his hand to the plough and entered God's vineyard as a simple labourer. My task is far from being ended here, sir; it is not enough to have raised the moral standard of the people, who lived in a frightful state of irreligion when I first came here; I would fain die among a generation fully convinced.'

'You have only done your duty,' the younger man retorted drily; he felt a pang of jealousy in his heart.

The other gave him a keen glance.

'Is this yet another test?' he seemed to say—but aloud he answered humbly, 'Yes.—I wish every hour of my life,' he added, 'that every one in the kingdom would do his duty.'

The deep underlying significance of those words was still further increased by the tone in which they were spoken. It was clear that here, in this year 1829, was a priest of great intellectual power, great likewise in the simplicity of his life; who, though he did not set up his own judgment against that of his superiors, saw none the less clearly whither the Church and the Monarchy were going.

When the mother and daughter had come, the Abbé left the parsonage and went down to see if the horses had been put in. He was very impatient to return to Limoges. A few minutes later he returned to say that all was in readiness for their departure, and the four set out on their journey. Every creature in Montégnac stood in the road about the post-house to see them go. The condemned man's mother and sister said not a word; and as for the two ecclesiastics, there were so many topics to be avoided that conversation was difficult, and they could neither appear indifferent nor try to take a cheerful tone. Still endeavouring to discover some neutral ground for their talk as they travelled on, the influences of the great plain seemed to prolong the melancholy silence.

'What made you accept the position of an ecclesiastic?' Gabriel asked at last out of idle curiosity, as the carriage turned into the high road.

'I have never regarded my office as a "position,"' the curé answered simply. 'I cannot understand how any one can take holy orders for any save the one indefinable and all-powerful reason—a vocation. I know that not a few have become labourers in the great vineyard with hearts worn out in the service of the passions; men who have loved without hope, or whose hopes have been disappointed; men whose lives were blighted when they laid the wife or the woman they loved in the grave; men grown weary of life in a world where in these times nothing, not even sentiments, are stable and secure, where

doubt makes sport of the sweetest certainties, and belief is called superstition.

'Some leave political life in times when to be in power seems to be a sort of expiation, when those who are governed look on obedience as an unfortunate necessity; and very many leave a battlefield without standards where powers, by nature opposed, combine to defeat and dethrone the right. I am not supposing that any man can give himself to God for what he may gain. There are some who appear to see in the clergy a means of regenerating our country; but, according to my dim lights, the patriot priest is a contradiction in terms. The priest should belong to God alone.

'I had no wish to offer to our Father, who yet accepts all things, a broken heart and an enfeebled will; I gave myself to Him whole and entire. It was a touching fancy in the old pagan religion which brought the victim crowned with flowers to the temple of the gods for sacrifice. There is something in that custom that has always appealed to me. A sacrifice is nothing unless it is made graciously.—So the story of my life is very simple, there is not the least touch of romance in it. Still, if you would like to hear a full confession, I will tell you all about myself.

'My family are well-to-do and almost wealthy. My father, a self-made man, is hard and inflexible; he deals the same measure to himself as to his wife and children. I have never seen the faintest smile on his lips. With a hand of iron, a brow of bronze, and an energetic nature at once sullen and morose, he crushed us all—wife and children, clerks and servants, beneath a savage tyranny. I think (I speak for myself alone) that I could have borne the life if the pressure brought to bear on us had been even; but he was crotchety and changeable, and this fitfulness made it unbearable. We never knew whether we had done right or wrong, and the horrible suspense in which we lived at home becomes intolerable in

domestic life. It is pleasanter to be out in the streets than in the house. Even as it was, if I had been alone at home, I could have borne all this without a murmur; but there was my mother, whom I loved passionately; the sight of her misery and the continual bitterness of her life broke my heart; and if, as sometimes happened, I surprised her in tears, I was beside myself with rage. I was sent to school; and those years, usually a time of hardship and drudgery, were a sort of golden age for me. I dreaded the holidays. My mother herself was glad to come to see me at the school.

'When I had finished my humanities, I went home and entered my father's office, but I could only stay there a few months; youth was strong in me, my mind might have given way.

'One dreary autumn evening my mother and I took a walk by ourselves along the Boulevard Bourdon, then one of the most depressing spots in Paris, and there I opened my heart to her. I said that I saw no possible life for me save in the Church. So long as my father lived I was bound to be thwarted in my tastes, my ideas, even in my affections. If I adopted the priest's cassock, he would be compelled to respect me, and in this way I might become a tower of strength to the family should occasion call for it. My mother cried bitterly. At that very time my older brother had enlisted as a common soldier, driven out of the house by the causes which had decided my vocation. (He became a general afterwards, and fell in the battle of Leipsic.) I pointed out to my mother as a way of salvation for her that she should marry my sister (as soon as she should be old enough to settle in life) to a man with plenty of character, and look to this new family for support.

'So in 1807, under the pretext of escaping the conscription without expense to my father, and at the same time declaring my vocation, I entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice at the age of nineteen. Within those famous old

walls I found happiness and peace, troubled only by thoughts of what my mother and sister must be enduring. Things had doubtless grown worse and worse at home, for when they came to see me they upheld me in my determination. Initiated, it may be, by my own pain into the secrets of charity, as the great Apostle has defined it in his sublime epistle, I longed to bind the wounds of the poor and suffering in some out-of-the-way spot; and thereafter to prove, if God deigned to bless my efforts, that the Catholic religion, as put in practice by man, is the one true, good, and noble civilising agent on earth.

'During those last days of my diaconate, grace doubtless enlightened me. Fully and freely I forgave my father, for I saw that through him I had found my real vocation. But my mother—in spite of a long and tender letter, in which I explained this, and showed how the trace of the finger of God was visible throughout—my mother shed many tears when she saw my hair fall under the scissors of the Church; for she knew how many joys I was renouncing, and did not know the hidden glories to which I aspired. Women are so tender-hearted. When at last I was God's, I felt an infinite peace. All the cravings, the vanities, and cares that vex so many souls fell away from me. I thought that Heaven would have care for me as for a vessel of its own. I went forth into a world from which all fear was driven out, where the future was sure, where everything is the work of God—even the silence. This quietness of soul is one of the gifts of grace. My mother could not imagine what it was to take a church for a bride; nevertheless, when she saw that I looked serene and happy, she was happy. After my ordination I came to pay a visit to some of my father's relatives in Limousin, and one of these by accident spoke of the state of things in the Montégnac district. With a sudden illumination like lightning, the thought flashed through my inmost soul—"Behold

thy vine!" And I came here. So, as you see, sir, my story is quite simple and uninteresting.'

As he spoke, Limoges appeared in the rays of the sunset, and at the sight the two women could not keep back their tears.

Meanwhile the young man whom love in its separate guises had come to find, the object of so much outspoken curiosity, hypocritical sympathy, and very keen anxiety, was lying on his prison mattress in the condemned cell. A spy at the door was on the watch for any words that might escape him waking or sleeping, or in one of his wild fits of fury; so bent was justice upon coming at the truth, and on discovering Jean-François's accomplice as well as the stolen money, by every means that the wit of man could devise.

The des Vanneaulx had the police in their interest; the police spies watched through the absolute silence. Whenever the man told off for this duty looked through the hole made for the purpose, he always saw the prisoner in the same attitude, bound in his strait waistcoat, his head tied up by a leather strap to prevent him from tearing the stuff and the thongs with his teeth. Jean-François lay staring at the ceiling with a fixed desperate gaze, his eyes glowed, and seemed as if they were reddened by the full-pulsed tide of life sent surging through him by terrible thoughts. It was as if an antique statue of Prometheus had become a living man, with the thought of some lost joy gnawing his heart; so when the second *avocat général* came to see him, the visitor could not help showing his surprise at a character so dogged. At sight of any human being admitted into his cell, Jean-François flew into a rage which exceeded everything in the doctors' experience of such affections. As soon as he heard the key turn in the lock, or the bolts drawn in the heavily ironed door, a light froth came to his lips.

In person, Jean-François Tascheron, twenty-five years of age, was short but well made. His hair was stiff and crisp, and grew rather low on his forehead, signs of great energy. The clear, brilliant, yellow eyes, set rather too close together, gave him something the look of a bird of prey. His face was of the round dark-skinned type common in Central France. One of his characteristics confirmed Lavater's assertion that the front teeth overlap in those predestined to be murderers; but the general expression of his face spoke of honesty, of simple warm-heartedness of disposition—it would have been nothing extraordinary if a woman had loved such a man passionately. The lines of the fresh mouth, with its dazzling white teeth, were gracious; there was that peculiar shade in the scarlet of the lips which indicates ferocity held in check, and frequently a temperament which thirsts for pleasure and demands free scope for indulgence. There was nothing of the workman's coarseness about him. To the women who watched his trial it seemed evident that it was a woman who had brought flexibility and softness into the fibre inured to toil, the look of distinction into the face of a son of the fields, and grace into his bearing. Women recognise the traces of love in a man, and men are quick to see in a woman whether (to use a colloquial phrase) Love has passed that way.

That evening Jean-François heard the sound as the bolts were withdrawn and the key was thrust into the lock; he turned his head quickly with the terrible smothered growl with which his fits of fury began; but he trembled violently when through the soft dusk he made out the forms of his mother and sister, and behind the two dear faces another—the curé of Montégnac.

'So this is what those barbarous wretches held in store for me!' he said, and closed his eyes.

Denise, with her prison experience, was suspicious of every least thing in the room; the spy had hidden himself, meaning, no doubt, to return; she fled to her

brother, laid her tear-stained face against his, and said in his ear, 'Can they hear what we say?'

'I should rather think they can, or they would not have sent you here,' he answered aloud. 'I have asked as a favour this long while that I might not see any of my family.'

'What a way they have treated him!' cried the mother, turning to the curé. 'My poor boy! my poor boy! . . .' She sank down on the foot of the mattress, and hid her face in the priest's cassock. The curé stood upright beside her. 'I cannot bear to see him bound and tied up like that and put into that sack . . .'

'If Jean will promise me to be good, to make no attempt on his life, and to behave well while we are with him, I will ask for leave to unbind him; but I shall suffer for the slightest infraction of his promise.'

'I have such a craving to stretch myself out and move freely, dear M. Bonnet,' said the condemned man, his eyes filling with tears, 'that I give you my word I will do as you wish.'

The curé went out, the gaoler came, and the strait waistcoat was taken off.

'You are not going to kill me this evening, are you?' asked the turnkey.

Jean made no answer.

'Poor brother!' said Denise, bringing out a basket, which had been strictly searched, 'there are one or two things here that you are fond of; here, of course, they grudge you every morsel you eat.'

She brought out fruit gathered as soon as she knew that she might see her brother in prison, and a cake which her mother had put aside at once. This thoughtfulness of theirs, which recalled old memories, his sister's voice and movements, the presence of his mother and the curé,—all combined to bring about a reaction in Jean. He burst into tears.

'Ah! Denise,' he said, 'I have not made a meal these

six months past; I have eaten because hunger drove me to eat, that is all.'

Mother and daughter went out and returned, and came and went. The housewifely instinct of seeing to a man's comfort put heart into them, and at last they set supper before their poor darling. The people of the prison helped them in this, having received orders to do all in their power compatible with the safe custody of the condemned man. The des Vanneaulx, with unkindly kindness, had done their part towards securing the comfort of the man in whose power their heritage lay. So Jean by these means was to know a last gleam of family happiness—happiness overshadowed by the sombre gloom of the prison and death.

'Was my appeal rejected?' he asked M. Bonnet.

'Yes, my boy. There is nothing left to you now but to make an end worthy of a Christian. This life of ours is as nothing compared with the life which awaits us; you must think of your happiness in eternity. Your account with men is settled by the forfeit of your life, but God requires more, a life is too small a thing for Him.'

'Forfeit my life? . . . Ah, you do not know all that I must leave behind.'

Denise looked at her brother, as if to remind him that prudence was called for even in matters of religion.

'Let us say nothing of that,' he went on, eating fruit with an eagerness that denoted a fierce and restless fire within. 'When must I——?'

'*No! no!* nothing of that before me!' cried the mother.

'I should be easier if I knew,' he said in a low voice, turning to the curé.

'The same as ever!' exclaimed M. Bonnet, and he bent to say in Jean's ear—'If you make your peace with God to-night, and your repentance permits me to give you absolution, it shall be to-morrow.'—Aloud he added,

'We have already gained something by calming you.'

At these last words, Jean grew white to the lips, his eyes contracted with a heavy scowl, his features quivered with the coming storm of rage.

'What, am I calm?' he asked himself. Luckily his eyes met the tearful eyes of his sister Denise, and he regained the mastery over himself.

'Ah, well,' he said, looking at the curé, 'I could not listen to any one but you. They knew well how to tame me,' and he suddenly dropped his head on his mother's shoulder.

'Listen, dear,' his mother said, weeping, 'our dear M. Bonnet is risking his own life by undertaking to be with you on the way to'—she hesitated, and then finished —'to eternal life.'

And she lowered Jean's head and held it for a few moments on her heart.

'Will he go with me?' asked Jean, looking at the curé, who took it upon himself to bow his head.—'Very well, I will listen to him. I will do everything that he requires of me.'

'Promise me that you will,' said Denise, 'for your soul must be saved; that is what we are all thinking of. And then—would you have it said in Limoges and all the country round that a Tascheron could not die like a man? After all, just think that all that you lose here you may find again in heaven, where forgiven souls will meet again.'

This preternatural effort parched the heroic girl's throat. Like her mother, she was silent, but she had won the victory. The criminal, hitherto frantic that justice had snatched away his cup of bliss, was thrilled with the sublime doctrine of the Catholic Church, expressed so artlessly by his sister. Every woman, even a peasant girl like Denise Tascheron, possesses at need this tender tact; does not every woman love to think that love

is eternal? Denise had touched two responsive chords. Awakened pride roused other qualities numbed by such utter misery and stunned by despair. Jean took his sister's hand in his and kissed it, and held her to his heart in a manner profoundly significant; tenderly, but in a mighty grasp.

'There,' he said, 'everything must be given up! That was my last heart-throb, my last thought—intrusted to you, Denise.' And he gave her such a look as a man gives at some solemn moment, when he strives to impress his whole soul on another soul.

A whole last testament lay in the words and the thoughts; the mother and sister, the curé and Jean, understood so well that these were mute bequests to be faithfully executed and loyally demanded, that they turned away their faces to hide their tears and the thoughts that might be read in their eyes. Those few words, spoken in the death agony of passion, were the farewell to fatherhood and all that was sweetest on earth —the earnest of a Catholic renunciation of the things of earth. The curé, awed by the majesty of human nature, by all its greatness even in sin, measured the force of this mysterious passion by the enormity of the crime, and raised his eyes as if to entreat God's mercy. In that action the touching consolation, the infinite tenderness of the Catholic faith was revealed—a religion that shows itself so human, so loving, by the hand stretched down to teach mankind the laws of a higher world, so awful, so divine, by the hand held out to guide him to heaven. It was Denise who had just discovered to the curé, in this mysterious manner, the spot where the rock would yield the streams of repentance. Suddenly Jean uttered a blood-curdling cry, like some hyæna caught by the hunters. Memories had awakened.

'No! no! no!' he cried, falling upon his knees. 'I want to live! Mother, take my place. Change clothes with me. I could escape! Have pity! Have pity! Go to the King and tell him . . .'

He stopped short, a horrible sound like the growl of a wild beast broke from him; he clutched fiercely at the curé's cassock.

'Go,' M. Bonnet said in a low voice, turning to the two women, who were quite overcome by this scene. Jean heard the word, and lifted his head. He looked up at his mother and sister, and kissed their feet.

'Let us say good-bye,' he said. 'Do not come back any more. Leave me alone with M. Bonnet; and do not be anxious about me now,' he added, as he clasped his mother and sister in a tight embrace, in which he seemed as though he would fain put all the life that was in him.

'How can any one go through all this and live?' asked Denise as they reached the wicket.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when they separated. The Abbé de Rastignac was waiting at the gate of the prison, and asked the two women for news.

'He will make his peace with God,' said Denise. 'If he has not repented already, repentance is near at hand.'

A few minutes later the Bishop learned that the Church would triumph in this matter, and that the condemned man would go to his execution with the most edifying religious sentiments. The public prosecutor was with his lordship, who expressed a wish to see the curé. It was midnight before M. Bonnet came. The Abbé Gabriel, who had been going to and fro between the palace and the prison, considered that the Bishop's carriage ought to be sent for him, for the poor man was so exhausted that he could scarcely stand. The thought of to-morrow's horrible journey, the anguish of soul which he had witnessed, the full and entire repentance of this member of his flock, who broke down completely at last when the great forecast of Eternity was put before him,—all these things had combined to wear out M. Bonnet's strength, for with his nervous temperament and electric swiftness of apprehension, he

was quick to feel the sorrows of others as if they were his own.

Souls like this beautiful soul are so open to receive the impressions, the sorrows, passions, and sufferings of those towards whom they are drawn, that they feel the pain as if it were in very truth their own, and this in a manner which is torture; for their clearer eyes can measure the whole extent of the misfortune in a way impossible to those blinded by the egoism of love or paroxysms of grief. In this respect such a confessor as M. Bonnet is an artist who feels, instead of an artist who judges.

In the drawing-room at the palace, where the two vicars-general, the public prosecutor, and M. de Granville, and the Abbé de Rastignac were waiting, it dawned upon M. Bonnet that he was expected to bring news.

'Monsieur le Curé,' the Bishop began, 'have you obtained any confessions with which you may in confidence enlighten justice without failing in your duty?'

'Before I gave absolution to that poor lost child, my lord, I was not content that his repentance should be as full and entire as the Church could require; I still further insisted on the restitution of the money.'

'I came here to the palace about that restitution,' said the public prosecutor. 'Some light will be thrown on obscure points in the case by the way in which it is made. He certainly has accomplices——'

'With the interests of man's justice I have no concern,' the curé said. 'I do not know how or where the restitution will be made, but made it will be. When my lord Bishop summoned me here to one of my own parishioners, he replaced me in the exact conditions which give a curé in his own parish the rights which a bishop exercises in his diocese—ecclesiastical obedience and discipline apart.

'Quite right,' said the Bishop. 'But the point is to

obtain a voluntary confession before justice from the condemned man.'

'My mission was simply to bring a soul to God,' returned M. Bonnet.

M. de Grancour shrugged his shoulders slightly, and the Abbé Dutheil nodded approval.

'Tascheron, no doubt, wants to screen some one whom a restitution would identify,' said the public prosecutor.

'Monsieur,' retorted the curé, 'I know absolutely nothing which might either confirm or contradict your conjecture; and, moreover, the secrets of the confessional are inviolable.'

'So the restitution will be made?' asked the man of law.

'Yes, monsieur,' answered the man of God.

'That is enough for me,' said the public prosecutor. He relied upon the cleverness of the police to find and follow up any clue, as if passion and personal interest were not keener witted than any detective.

Two days later, on a market day, Jean-François Tascheron went to his death in a manner which left all pious and politic souls nothing to desire. His humility and piety were exemplary; he kissed with fervour the crucifix which M. Bonnet held out to him with trembling hands. The unfortunate man was closely scanned; all eyes were on the watch to see the direction his glances might take; would he look up at one of the houses, or gaze on some face in the crowd? His discretion was complete and inviolable. He met his death like a Christian, penitent and forgiven.

The poor curé of Montégnac was taken away unconscious from the foot of the scaffold, though he had not so much as set eyes on the fatal machine.

The next day at nightfall, three leagues away from

Limoges, out on the high road, and in a lonely spot, Denise Tascheron suddenly stopped. Exhausted though she was with physical weariness and sorrow, she begged her father to allow her to go back to Limoges with Louis-Marie Tascheron, one of her brothers.

'What more do you want to do in that place?' her father asked sharply, raising his eyebrows, and frowning.

'We have not only to pay the lawyer, father,' she said in his ear; 'there is something else. The money that he hid must be given back.'

'That is only right,' said the rigorously honest man, fumbling in a leather purse which he carried about him.

'No,' Denise said swiftly, 'he is your son no longer; and those who blessed, not those who cursed him, ought to pay the lawyer's fees.'

'We will wait for you at Havre,' her father said.

Denise and her brother crept into the town again before it was day. Though the police learned later on that two of the Taschérons had come back, they never could discover their lodging. It was near four o'clock when Denise and her brother went to the higher end of the town, stealing along close to the walls. The poor girl dared not look up, lest the eyes which should meet hers had seen her brother's head fall. First of all, she had sought out M. Bonnet, and he, unwell though he was, had consented to act as Denise's father and guardian for the time being. With him they went to the barrister, who lived in the Rue de la Comédie.

'Good day, poor children,' the lawyer began, with a bow to M. Bonnet. 'How can I be of use to you? Perhaps you want me to make application for your brother's body.'

'No, sir,' said Denise, her tears flowing at the thought, which had not occurred to her; 'I have come to pay our debt to you, in so far as money can repay an eternal debt.'

'Sit down a moment,' said the lawyer, seeing that

Denise and the curé were both standing. Denise turned away to draw from her stays two notes of five hundred francs, pinned to her shift. Then she sat down and handed over the bills to her brother's counsel. The curé looked at the lawyer with a light in his eyes, which soon filled with tears.

'Keep it,' the barrister said; 'keep the money yourself, my poor girl. Rich people do not pay for a lost cause in this generous way.'

'I cannot do as you ask, sir, it is impossible,' said Denise.

'Then the money does not come from you?' the barrister asked quickly.

'Pardon me,' she replied, with a questioning glance at M. Bonnet—would God be angry with her for that lie?

The curé kept his eyes lowered.

'Very well,' said the barrister, and, keeping one of the notes in his hand, he gave the other to the curé, 'then I will divide it with the poor. And now, Denise, this is certainly mine'—he held out the note as he spoke—'will you give me your velvet ribbon and gold cross in exchange for it? I will hang the cross above my chimney-piece in memory of the purest and kindest girl's heart which I shall ever meet with, I doubt not, in my career.'

'There is no need to buy it,' cried Denise, 'I will give it you,' and she took off her gilt cross and handed it to the lawyer.

'Very well, sir,' said the curé, 'I accept the five hundred francs to pay the expenses of exhuming and removing the poor boy's body to the churchyard at Montégnac. Doubtless God has forgiven him; Jean will rise again with all my flock at the Last Day, when the just and the penitent sinner will be summoned to sit at the Father's right hand.'

'So be it,' said the barrister. He took Denise's hand and drew her towards him to put a kiss on her forehead, a movement made with another end in view.

'My child,' he said, 'nobody at Montégnac has such a thing as a five hundred franc note; they are rather scarce in Limoges; people don't take them here without asking something for changing them. So this money has been given to you by somebody; you are not going to tell me who it was, and I do not ask you, but listen to this: if you have anything left to do here which has any reference to your poor brother, mind how you set about it. M. Bonnet and you and your brother will all three of you be watched by spies. People know that your family have gone away. If anybody recognises you here, you will be surrounded before you suspect it.'

'Alas!' she said, 'I have nothing left to do here.'

'She is cautious,' said the lawyer to himself, as he went to the door with her. 'She has been warned, so let her extricate herself.'

It was late September, but the days were as hot as in the summer. The Bishop was giving a dinner-party. The local authorities, the public prosecutor, and the first *avocat général* were among the guests. Discussions were started, which grew lively in the course of the evening, and it was very late before they broke up. Whist and backgammon, that game beloved of bishops, were the order of the day. It happened that about eleven o'clock the public prosecutor stepped out upon the upper terrace, and from the corner where he stood saw a light on the island, which the Abbé Gabriel and the Bishop had already fixed upon as the central spot and clue to the inexplicable tangle about Tascheron's crime—on Véronique's Isle of France in fact. There was no apparent reason why anybody should kindle a fire in the middle of the Vienne at that time of night—then, all at once, the idea which had struck the Bishop and his secretary flashed upon the public prosecutor's brain, with a light as sudden as that of the fire which shot up out of the distant darkness.

Just as Denise was about to fling the fourth wrapper into the fire

Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher

'What a set of great fools we have all been!' cried he, 'but we have the accomplices now.'

He went up to the drawing-room again, found out M. de Granville, and said a word or two in his ear; then both of them vanished. But the Abbé de Rastignac, courteously attentive, watched them go out, saw that they went towards the terrace, and noticed too that fire on the shore of the island.

'It is all over with her,' thought he.

The messengers of justice arrived on the spot—too late. Denise and Louis-Marie (whom his brother Jean had taught to dive) were there, it is true, on the bank of the Vienne at a place pointed out by Jean; but Louis-Marie had already dived four times, and each time had brought up with him twenty thousand francs in gold. The first instalment was secured in a bandana with the four corners tied up. As soon as the water had been wrung from the handkerchief, it was thrown on a great fire of dry sticks, kindled beforehand. A shawl contained the second, and the third was secured in a lawn handkerchief. Just as Denise was about to fling the fourth wrapper into the fire, the police came up accompanied by a commissary, and pounced upon a very important clue, as they thought, which Denise suffered them to seize without the slightest emotion. It was a man's pocket-handkerchief, which still retained some stains of blood in spite of its long immersion. Questioned forthwith as to her proceedings, Denise said that she had brought the stolen money out of the river, as her brother bade her. To the commissary, inquiring why she had burned the wrappings, she answered that she was following out her brother's instructions. Asked what the wrappings were, she replied boldly, and with perfect truth, 'A bandana handkerchief, a lawn handkerchief, and a shawl.'

The handkerchief which had just been seized belonged to her brother.

This fishing expedition and the circumstances accom-

panying it made plenty of talk in Limoges. The shawl in particular confirmed the belief that there was a love affair at the bottom of Tascheron's crime.

'He is dead, but he shields her still,' commented one lady, when she heard these final revelations, so cleverly rendered useless.

'Perhaps there is some married man in Limoges who will find that he is a bandana short, but he will perforce hold his tongue,' smiled the public prosecutor.

'Little mistakes in one's wardrobe have come to be so compromising, that I shall set about verifying mine this very evening,' said old Mme. Perret, smiling too.

'Whose are the dainty little feet that left the foot-marks, so carefully erased?' asked M. de Granville.

'Pshaw! perhaps they belong to some ugly woman,' returned the *avocat général.*

'She has paid dear for her slip,' remarked the Abbé de Grancour.

'Do you know what all this business goes to prove?' put in the *avocat général.* 'It just shows how much women have lost through the Revolution, which obliterated social distinctions. Such a passion is only to be met with nowadays in a man who knows that there is an enormous distance between his and the woman he loves.'

'You credit love with many vanities,' returned the Abbé Dutheil.

'What does Mme. Graslin think?' asked the prefect.

'What would you have her think? She was confined, as she told me she would be, on the day of the execution, and has seen nobody since; she is dangerously ill,' said M. de Granville.

Meanwhile, in another room in Limoges, an almost comic scene was taking place. The des Vanneaulx's friends were congratulating them upon the restitution of their inheritance.

'Well, well,' said Mme. des Vanneaulx, 'they ought to have let him off, poor man. It was love, and not mercenary motives, that brought him to it; he was neither vicious nor wicked.'

'He behaved like a thorough gentleman,' said the Sieur des Vanneaulx. '*If I knew where his family was, I would do something for them;* they are good people, those Taschérons.'

When Mme. Graslin was well enough to rise, towards the end of the year 1829, after the long illness which followed her confinement, and obliged her to keep her bed in absolute solitude and quiet, she heard her husband speak of a rather considerable piece of business which he wanted to conclude. The Navarreins family thought of selling the forest of Montégnac and the waste lands which they owned in the neighbourhood. Graslin had not yet put into execution a clause in his wife's marriage settlement, which required that her dowry should be invested in land; he had preferred to put her money out at interest through the bank, and already had doubled her capital. On this, Véronique seemed to recollect the name of Montégnac, and begged her husband to carry out the contract by purchasing the estate for her.

M. Graslin wished very much to see M. Bonnet, to ask for information concerning the forest and lands which the Duc de Navarreins thought of selling. The Duc de Navarreins, be it said, foresaw the hideous struggle which the Prince de Polignac had made inevitable between the Liberals and the Bourbon dynasty; and augured the worst, for which reasons he was one of the boldest opponents of the Coup d'État. The Duke had sent his man of business to Limoges with instructions to sell, if a bidder could be found for so large a sum of money, for His Grace recollected the Revolution of 1789 too well not to profit by the lessons then taught to the aristocracy. It was this man of business who, for

more than a month, had been at close quarters with Graslin, the shrewdest old fox in Limousin, and the only man whom common report singled out as being able to pay down the price of so large an estate on the spot.

At a word sent by the Abbé Dutheil, M. Bonnet hastened to Limoges and the Hôtel Graslin. Véronique would have prayed the curé to dine with her; but the banker only allowed M. Bonnet to go up to his wife's room after he had kept him a full hour in his private office, and obtained information which satisfied him so well, that he concluded his purchase out of hand, and the forest and domain of Montégnac became his (Graslin's) for five hundred thousand francs. He acquiesced in his wife's wish, stipulating that this purchase and any outlay relating thereto should be held to accomplish the clause in her marriage contract as to her fortune. Graslin did this the more willingly because the piece of honesty now cost him nothing.

At the time of Graslin's purchase the estate consisted of the forest of Montégnac, some thirty thousand acres in extent, but too inaccessible to bring in any money, the ruined castle, the gardens, and some five thousand acres in the uncultivated plains under Montégnac. Graslin made several more purchases at once, so as to have the whole of the first peak of the Corrézien range in his hands, for there the vast forest of Montégnac came to an end. Since the taxes had been levied upon it, the Duc de Navarreins had not drawn fifteen thousand francs a year from the manor, formerly one of the richest tenures in the kingdom. The lands had escaped sale when put up under the Convention, partly because of their barrenness, partly because it was a recognised fact that nothing could be made of them.

When the curé came face to face with the woman of whom he had heard, a woman whose cleverness and piety were well known, he started in spite of himself. At this time Véronique had entered upon the third

period of her life, a period in which she was to grow greater by the exercise of the loftiest virtues, and become a totally different woman. To the Raphael's Madonna, hidden beneath the veil of smallpox scars, a beautiful, noble, and impassioned woman had succeeded, a woman afterwards laid low by inward sorrows, from which a saint emerged. Her complexion had taken the sallow tint seen in the austere faces of Abbesses of ascetic life. A yellowish hue had overspread the temples, grown less imperious now. The lips were paler, the red of the opening pomegranate flower had changed into the paler crimson of the Bengal rose. Between the nose and the corners of the eyes sorrow had worn two pearly channels, down which many tears had coursed in secret; much weeping had worn away the traces of small-pox. It was impossible not to fix your eyes on the spot where a network of tiny blue veins stood out swollen and distended with the full pulses that throbbed there, as if they fed the source of many tears. The faint brownish tinge about the eyes alone remained, but there were dark circles under them now, and wrinkles in the eyelids which told of terrible suffering. The lines in the hollow cheeks bore record of solemn thoughts. The chin, too, had shrunk, it had lost its youthful fulness of outline, and this scarcely to the advantage of a face which wore an expression of pitiless austerity, confined however solely to Véronique herself. At twenty-nine years of age her hair, one of her greatest beauties, had faded and grown scanty; she had been obliged to pull out a large quantity of white hair, bleached during her confinement. Her thinness was shocking to see. In spite of the doctor's orders, she had persisted in nursing her child herself; and the doctor was not disposed to let people forget this when all his evil prognostications were so thoroughly fulfilled.

'See what a difference a single confinement has made in a woman!' said he. 'And she worships that child of

hers; but I have always noticed that the more a child costs the mother, the dearer it is.'

All that remained of youth in Véronique's face lay in her eyes, wan though they were. An untamed fire flashed from the dark blue iris; all the life that had deserted the cold impassive mask of a face, expressionless now save for the charitable look which it wore when her poorer neighbours were spoken of, seemed to have taken refuge there. So the curé's first dismay and surprise abated somewhat as he went on to explain to her how much good a resident landowner might effect in Montégnac, and for a moment Véronique's face grew beautiful, lighted up by this unexpected hope which began to shine in upon her.

'I will go there,' she said. 'It shall be my property. I will ask M. Graslin to put some funds at my disposal, and I will enter into your charitable work with all my might. Montégnac shall be cultivated, we will find water somewhere to irrigate the waste land in the plain. You are striking the rock, like Moses, and tears will flow from it!'

The curé de Montégnac spoke of Mme. Graslin as a saint when his friends in Limoges asked him about her.

The very day after the purchase was completed, Graslin sent an architect to Montégnac. He was determined to restore the castle, the gardens, terraces, and park, to reclaim the forest by a plantation, putting an ostentatious activity into all that he did.

Two years later a great misfortune befell Mme. Graslin. Her husband, in spite of his prudence, was involved in the commercial and financial disasters of 1830. The thought of bankruptcy, or of losing three millions, the gains of a lifetime of toil, were both intolerable to him. The worry and anxiety aggravated the inflammatory disease, always lurking in his system, the result of impure blood. He was compelled to take to his bed. In Véronique a friendly feeling towards Graslin had developed during

her pregnancy, and dealt a fatal blow to the hopes of her admirer, M. de Granville. By careful nursing she tried to save her husband's life, but only succeeded in prolonging a suffering existence for a few months. This respite, however, was very useful to Grossetête, who, foreseeing the end, consulted with his old comrade, and made all the necessary arrangements for a prompt realisation.

In April 1831 Graslin died, and his widow's despairing grief only sobered down into Christian resignation. From the first Véronique had wished to give up her whole fortune to her husband's creditors; but M. Graslin's estate proved to be more than sufficient. It was Grossetête who wound up his affairs, and two months after the settlement Mme. Graslin found herself the mistress of the domains of Montégnac and of six hundred and sixty thousand francs, all her own; and no blot rested on her son's name. No one had lost anything through Graslin—not even his wife; and Francis Graslin had about a hundred thousand francs.

Then M. de Granville, who had reason to know Véronique's nature and loftiness of soul, came forward as a suitor; but, to the amazement of all Limoges, Mme. Graslin refused the newly-appointed public prosecutor, on the ground that second marriages were discountenanced by the Church. Grossetête, a man of unerring forecast and sound sense, advised Véronique to invest the rest of M. Graslin's fortune and her own in the Funds, and effected this for her himself at once, in the month of July, when the three per cents. stood at fifty. So Francis had an income of six thousand livres, and his mother about forty thousand. Véronique was still the greatest fortune in the department.

All was settled at last, and Mme. Graslin gave out that she meant to leave Limoges to live nearer to M. Bonnet. Again she sent for the curé, to consult him about his work at Montégnac, in which she was determined to share; but he generously tried to dissuade her,

and to make it clear to her that her place was in society.

'I have sprung from the people, and I mean to return to them,' said she.

The curé's great love for his own village resisted the more feebly when he learned that Mme. Graslin had arranged to make over her house in Limoges to M. Grossetête. Certain sums were due to the banker, and he took the house at its full value in settlement.

Mme. Graslin finally left Limoges towards the end of August 1831. A troop of friends gathered about her, and went with her as far as the outskirts of the town; some of them went the whole first stage of the journey. Véronique travelled in a calèche with her mother; the Abbé Dutheil, recently appointed to a bishopric, sat opposite them with old M. Grossetête. As they went through the Place d'Aine, Véronique's emotion was almost uncontrollable; her face contracted; every muscle quivered with the pain; she snatched up her child, and held him tightly to her in a convulsive grasp, while La Sauviat tried to cover her emotion by following her example—it seemed that La Sauviat was not unprepared for something of this kind.

Chance so ordered it that Mme. Graslin caught a glimpse of the house where her father had lived; she clutched Mme. Sauviat's hand, great tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. When Limoges was fairly left behind, she turned and took a last farewell glance; and all her friends noticed a certain look of happiness in her face. When the public prosecutor, the young man of five-and-twenty whom she had declined to marry, came up and kissed her hand with lively expressions of regret, the newly-made Bishop noticed something strange in Véronique's eyes: the dark pupils dilated till the blue became a thin ring about them. It was unmistakable that some violent revulsion took place within her.

'Now I shall never see him again!' she said in her

mother's ear, but there was not the slightest trace of feeling in the impassive old face as Mme. Sauviat received that confidence.

Grossetête, the shrewd old banker, sitting opposite, watching the women with keen eyes, had not discovered that Véronique hated this man, whom for that matter she received as a visitor. In things of this kind a churchman is far clearer-sighted than other men, and the Bishop surprised Véronique by a glance that revealed an ecclesiastic's perspicacity.

'You have no regret in leaving Limoges?' the Bishop said to Mme. Graslin.

'You are leaving the town,' she replied. 'And M. Grossetête scarcely ever comes among us now,' she added, with a smile for her old friend as he said good-bye.

The Bishop went the whole of the way to Montégnac with Véronique.

'I ought to have made this journey in mourning,' she said in her mother's ear as they walked up the hill near Saint-Léonard.

The old woman turned her crabbed, wrinkled face, and laid her finger on her lips; then she pointed to the Bishop, who was giving the child a terrible scrutiny. Her mother's gesture first, and yet more the significant expression in the Bishop's eyes, made Mme. Graslin shudder. The light died out of her face as she looked out across the wide grey stretch of plain before Montégnac, and melancholy overcame her. All at once she saw the curé coming to meet her, and made him take a seat in the carriage.

'This is your domain,' said M. Bonnet, indicating the level waste.

IV

MADAME GRASLIN AT MONTÉGNAC.

In a few moments the township of Montégnac came in sight; the hillside and the conspicuous new buildings upon it shone golden in the light of the sunset; it was a lovely landscape like an oasis in the desert, with a picturesque charm of its own, due to the contrast with its setting. Mme. Graslin's eyes began to fill with tears. The curé pointed out a broad white track like a scar on the hillside.

'That is what my parishioners have done to show their gratitude to their lady of the manor,' he said. 'We can drive the whole way to the château. The road is finished now, and has not cost you a sou; we shall put in a row of trees beside it in two months' time. My Lord Bishop can imagine how much toil, thought, and devotion went to the making of such a change.'

'And they have done this themselves!' said the Bishop.

'They would take nothing in return, my lord. The poorest lent a hand, for they all knew that one who would be like a mother to them was coming to live among us.'

There was a crowd at the foot of the hill, all the village was there. Guns were fired off, and mortars exploded, and then the two prettiest girls of Montégnac, in white dresses, came to offer flowers and fruit to Mme. Graslin.

'That I should be welcomed here like this!' she cried, clutching M. Bonnet's hand as if she felt that she was falling over a precipice.

The crowd went up as far as the great iron gateway, whence Mme. Graslin could see her château. At first

sight the splendour of her dwelling was a shock to her. Stone for building is scarce in this district, for the native granite is hard and exceedingly difficult to work; so Graslin's architect had used brick for the main body of the great building, there being plenty of brick earth in the forest of Montégnac, and wood for the felling. All the woodwork and stone in fact came also from the forest and the quarries in it. But for these economies, Graslin must have been put to a ruinous expense; but as it was, the principal outlay was for wages, carriage, and salaries, and the money circulating in the township had put new life into it.

At a first glance the château stood up a huge red mass, scored with dark lines of mortar, and outlined with grey, for the facings and quoins and the string courses along each story were of granite, each block being cut in facets diamond fashion. The surface of the brick walls round the courtyard (a sloping oval like the court-yard of Versailles) was broken by slabs of granite surrounded by bosses, and set at equal distances. Shrubs had been planted under the walls, with a view to obtaining the contrasts of their various foliage. Two handsome iron gateways gave access on the one hand to the terrace which overlooked Montégnac, and on the other to a farm and outbuildings. The great gateway at the summit of the new road, which had just been finished, had a neat lodge on either side, built in the style of the sixteenth century.

The façade of the château fronted the courtyard and faced the west. It consisted of three towers, the central towers being connected with the one on either side of it by two wings. The back of the house was precisely similar, and looked over the gardens towards the east. There was but one window in each tower on the side of the courtyard and gardens, each wing having three. The centre tower was built something after the fashion of a campanile, the corner stones were vermiculated, and

here some delicate sculptured work had been sparingly introduced. Art is timid in the provinces; and though in 1829 some progress had been made in architectural ornament (thanks to certain writers), the owners of houses shrank at that time from an expense which lack of competition and scarcity of craftsmen rendered somewhat formidable.

The tower at either end (three windows in depth) was crowned by a high-pitched roof, with a granite balustrade by way of decoration; each angle of the pyramid was sharply cut by an elegant balcony lined with lead, and surrounded by cast-iron railings, and an elegantly sculptured window occupying each side of the roof. All the door and window cornices on each story were likewise ornamented with carved work copied from Genoese palace fronts. The three side windows of the southern tower looked out over Montégnac, the northern gave a view of the forest.

From the eastern windows you could see beyond the gardens that part of Montégnac where the Tascherons had lived, and far down below in the valley the road which led to the chief town in the arrondissement. From the west front which gave upon the courtyard, you saw the wide map of the plain stretching away on the Montégnac side to the mountains of the Corrèze, and elsewhere to the circle of the horizon, where it blended with the sky.

The wings were low, the single story being built in the mansard roof, in the old French style, but the towers at either end rose a story higher. The central tower was crowned by a sort of flattened dome like the Clock Towers of the Tuileries or the Louvre; the single room in the turret was a sort of belvedere, and fitted with a turret-clock. Ridge tiles had been used for economy's sake; the massive balks of timber from the forest readily carried the enormous weight of the roof.

Graslin's 'folly,' as he called the château, had brought

five hundred thousand francs into the commune. He had planned the road before he died, and the commune out of gratitude had finished it. Montégnac had moreover grown considerably. Behind the stables and outbuildings, on the north side of the hill where it slopes gradually down into the plain, Graslin had begun to build the steadings of a farm on a large scale, which showed that he had meant to turn the waste land in the plain to account. The plantations considered indispensable by M. Bonnet were still proceeding under the direction of a head gardener with six men, who were lodged in the outbuildings.

The whole ground floor of the château, taken up by sitting-rooms, had been splendidly furnished, but the second story was rather bare, M. Graslin's death having suspended the upholsterer's operations.

'Ah! my lord,' said Mme. Graslin, turning to the Bishop, after they had been through the château, 'I had thought to live here in a thatched cottage. Poor M. Graslin committed many follies——'

'And you——' the Bishop added, after a pause, and Mme. Graslin's light shudder did not escape him—'*you* are about to do charitable deeds, are you not?'

She went to her mother, who held little Francis by the hand, laid her hand on the old woman's arm, and went with the two as far as the long terrace which rose above the church and the parsonage; all the houses in the village, rising stepwise up the hillside, could be seen at once. The curé took possession of M. Dutheil, and began to point out the various features of the landscape; but the eyes of both ecclesiastics soon turned to the terrace, where Véronique and her mother stood motionless as statues; the older woman took out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes, her daughter leant upon the balustrade, and seemed to be pointing out the church below.

'What is the matter, madame?' the Curé Bonnet asked, turning to La Sauviat.

'Nothing,' answered Mme. Graslin, coming towards the two priests and facing them. 'I did not know that the churchyard would be right under my eyes——'

'You can have it removed; the law is on your side.'

'*The law!*' the words broke from her like a cry of pain.

Again the Bishop looked at Véronique. But she—tired of meeting that sombre glance, which seemed to lay bare the soul and discover her secret in its depths, a secret buried in a grave in that churchyard—cried out—

'Very well, then—*yes*!'

The Bishop laid his hand over his eyes, so overwhelmed by this, that for some moments he stood lost in thought.

'Hold her up,' cried the old mother; 'she is turning pale.'

'The air here is so keen, I have taken a chill,' murmured Mme. Graslin, and she sank fainting as the two ecclesiastics caught her in their arms. They carried her into the house, and when she came to herself again she saw the Bishop and the curé kneeling in prayer for her.

'May the angel which has visited you ever stay beside you!' the Bishop said, as he gave her his blessing. 'Adieu, my daughter.'

Mme. Graslin burst into tears at the words.

'Is she really saved?' cried the old mother.

'In this world and in the next,' the Bishop turned to answer, as he left the room.

Mme. Graslin had been carried by her mother's orders to a room on the first floor of the southern tower; the windows looked out upon the churchyard and the south side of Montégnac. Here she chose to remain, and installed herself there as best she could with her maid Aline, and little Francis. Mme. Sauviat's room naturally was near her daughter's.

It was some days before Mme. Graslin recovered from the cruel agitation which prostrated her on the day of her arrival, and, moreover, her mother insisted that she must stay in bed in the morning. In the evening,

however, Véronique came to sit on a bench on the terrace, and looked down on the church and parsonage and into the churchyard. In spite of mute opposition on Mme. Sauviat's part, Véronique contracted a habit of always sitting in the same place and giving way to melancholy broodings; it was almost a mania.

'Madame is dying,' Aline said to the old mother.

At last the two women spoke to the curé; and he, good man, who had shrunk from intruding himself upon Mme. Graslin, came assiduously to see her when he learned that she was suffering from some malady of the soul, carefully timing his visits so that he always found Véronique and the child, both in mourning, out on the terrace. The country was already beginning to look dreary and sombre in the early days of October.

When Véronique first came to the château, M. Bonnet had seen at once that she was suffering from some hidden wound, but he thought it better to wait until his future penitent should give him her confidence. One evening, however, he saw an expression in Mme. Graslin's eyes that warned him to hesitate no longer—the dull apathy of a mind brooding over the thought of death. He set himself to check the progress of this cruel disease of the mind.

At first there was a sort of struggle between them, a fence of empty words, each of them striving to disguise their thoughts. The evening was chilly, but for all that, Véronique sat out on the granite bench with little Francis on her knee. She could not see the churchyard, for Mme. Sauviat, leaning against the parapet, deliberately shut it out from sight. Aline stood waiting to take the child in-doors. It was the seventh time that the curé had found Véronique there on the terrace. He spoke—

'I used to think that you were merely sad, madame, but,' and he lowered his voice and spoke in her ear, 'this is despair. Despair is neither Christian nor Catholic.'

'Oh!' she exclaimed, with an intent glance at the

sky, and a bitter smile stole over her lips, 'what would the Church leave to a damned soul, if not despair?'

Her words revealed to the curé how far this soul had been laid waste.

'Ah! you are making for yourself a hell out of this hillside, when it should rather be a Calvary whence your soul might lift itself up towards Heaven.'

'I am too humble now,' she said, 'to put myself on such a pedestal,' and her tone was a revelation of the depth of her self-scorn.

Then a sudden light flashed across the curé—one of the inspirations which come so often and so naturally to noble and pure souls who live with God. He took up the child and kissed him on the forehead. 'Poor little one!' he said, in a fatherly voice, and gave the child to the nurse, who took him away. Mme. Sauviat looked at her daughter, and saw how powerfully those words had wrought on her, for Véronique's eyes, long dry, were wet with tears. Then she too went, with a sign to the priest.

'Will you take a walk on the terrace?' suggested M. Bonnet when they were alone. 'You are in my charge; I am accountable to God for your sick soul,' and they went towards the end of the terrace above 'Tascherons'.'

'Leave me to recover from my prostration,' she said.

'Your prostration is the result of pernicious broodings.'

'Yes,' she said, with the naïveté of pain, too sorely troubled to fence any longer.

'I see,' he answered; 'you have sunk into the depths of indifference. If physical pain passes a certain point it extinguishes modesty, and so it is with mental anguish, it reaches a degree when the soul grows faint within us; I know.'

Véronique was not prepared for this subtle observation and tender pity in M. Bonnet; but as has been seen already, the quick sympathies of a heart unjaded by

emotion of its own had taught him to detect and feel the pain of others among his flock with the maternal instinct of a woman. This apostolic tenderness, this *mens divinior*, raises the priest above his fellow-men and makes of him a being divine. Mme. Graslin had not as yet looked deep enough into the curé's nature to discover the beauty hidden away in that soul, the source of its grace and freshness and its inner life.

'Ah! monsieur . . .' she began, and a glance and a gesture, such a gesture and glance as the dying give, put her secret into his keeping.

'I understand!' he answered. 'But what then? What is to be done?'

Silently they went along the terrace towards the plain. To the bearer of good tidings, the son of Christ, the solemn moment seemed propitious.

'Suppose that you stood now before the Throne of God,' he said, and his voice grew low and mysterious, 'what would you say to Him?'

Mme. Graslin stopped short as if thunderstruck; a light shudder ran through her.

'I should say to Him as Christ said, "My Father, Thou hast forsaken me!"' she answered simply. The tones of her voice brought tears to the curé's eyes.

'Oh Magdalen, those are the very words I was waiting to hear!' he exclaimed, unable to refuse his admiration. 'You see, you appeal to God's justice! Listen, madame, Religion is the rule of God before the time. The Church reserves the right of judgment in all that concerns the soul. Man's justice is but the faint image of God's justice, a pale shadow of the eternal adapted to the temporal needs of society.'

'What do you mean?'

'You are not judge in your own cause, you are amenable to God; you have no right to condemn nor to pardon yourself. God is the great Reviser of judgments, my daughter.'

'Ah!' she cried.

'He *sees* to the origin of all things, while we only see the things themselves.'

Again Véronique stopped. These ideas were new to her.

'To a soul as lofty as yours,' he went on courageously, 'I do not speak as to my poor parishioners; I owe it to you to use a different language. You who have so cultivated your mind can rise to the knowledge of the spirit of the Catholic religion, which words and symbols must express and make visible to the eyes of babes and the poor. Follow what I am about to say carefully, for it refers to you; and if the point of view which I take for the moment seems wide, it is none the less your own case which I am considering.

'Justice, devised for the protection of society, is based upon a theory of the equality of individuals. Society, which is nothing but an aggregation of facts, is based on *inequality*. So there is a fundamental discrepancy between justice and fact. Should the law exercise a restraining or encouraging influence on the progress of society? In other words, should the law oppose itself to the internal tendency of society, so as to maintain things as they are; or, on the other hand, should the law be more flexible, adapt itself, and keep pace with the tendency so as to guide it? No maker of laws since men began to live together has taken it upon himself to decide that problem. All legislators have been content to analyse facts, to indicate those which seemed to them to be blameworthy or criminal, and to prescribe punishments or rewards. Such is law as man has made it. It is powerless to prevent evil-doing; powerless no less to prevent offenders who have been punished from offending again.

'Philanthropy is a sublime error. Philanthropy vainly applies severe discipline to the body, while it cannot find the balm which heals the soul. Philanthropy conceives

projects, sets forth theories, and leaves mankind to carry them out by means of silence, work, and discipline—dumb methods, with no virtue in them. Religion knows nought of these imperfections; for her, life extends beyond this world; for Religion, we are all of us fallen creatures in a state of degradation, and it is this very view of mankind which opens out to us an inexhaustible treasure of indulgence. All of us are on the way to our complete regeneration, some of us are further advanced, and some less, but none of us are infallible; the Church is prepared for sins, ay, and even for crimes. In a criminal, society sees an individual to be cut off from its midst, but the Church sees in him a soul to be saved. And more, far more! . . . Inspired by God, whose dealings with man She watches and ponders, the Church admits our inequality as human beings, and takes the disproportionate burden into account, and we who are so unequal in heart, in body or mind, in courage or aptitude, are made equal by repentance. In this, madame, equality is no empty word; we can be, and are, all equal through our sentiments.

'One idea runs through all religions, from the uncouth fetichism of the savage to the graceful imaginings of the Greek and the profound and ingenious doctrines of India and Egypt, an idea that finds expression in all cults joyous or gloomy, a conviction of man's fall and of his sin, whence, everywhere, the idea of sacrifice and redemption.

'The death of the Redeemer who died for the whole human race is for us a Symbol; this, too, we must do for ourselves; we must redeem our errors!—redeem our sins!—redeem our crimes! There is no sin beyond redemption—all Catholicism lies in that. It is the wherefore of the holy sacraments which assist in the work of grace and sustain the repentant sinner. And though one should weep, madame, and sigh like the Magdalen in the desert, this is but the beginning—an

action is the end. The monasteries wept, but acted too; they prayed, but they civilised; they were the active practical spreaders of our divine religion. They built, and planted, and tilled Europe; they rescued the treasures of learning for us; to them we owe the preservation of our jurisprudence, our traditions of statecraft and art. The sites of those centres of light will be for ever remembered in Europe with gratitude. Most modern towns sprang up about a monastery.

'If you believe that God is to judge you, the Church, using my voice, tells you that there is no sin beyond redemption through the good works of repentance. The evil we have wrought is weighed against the good that we have done by the great hands of God. Be yourself a monastery here; it is within your power to work miracles once more. For you, work must be prayer. Your work should be to diffuse happiness among those above whom you have been set by your fortune and your intellect, and in all ways, even by your natural position, for the height of your château above the village is a visible expression of your social position.'

They were turning towards the plains as he spoke, so that the curé could point out the village on the lower slopes of the hill and the château towering above it. It was half-past four in the afternoon. A shaft of yellow sunlight fell across the terrace and the gardens; it lighted up the château and brought out the pattern of the gleaming gilt scroll-work on the corner balconies high up on the towers; it lit the plain which stretched into the distance divided by the road, a sober grey ribbon with no embroidery of trees as yet to outline a waving green border on either side. Véronique and M. Bonnet passed the end of the château and came into the courtyard, beyond which the stables and farm buildings lay in sight, and further yet the forest of Montégnac; the sunlight slid across the landscape like a lingering caress. Even when the last glow of the sunset had faded except

from the highest hills, it was still light enough in the plain below to see all the chance effects of colour in the splendid tapestry of an autumn forest spread between Montégnac and the first peak of the chain of the Corrèze. The oak-trees stood out like masses of Florentine bronze among the verdigris greens of the walnuts and chestnuts; the leaves of a few trees, the first to change, shone like gold among the others; and all these different shades of colour were emphasised by the grey patches of bare earth. The trunks of leafless trees looked like pale columns; and every tint, red, tawny, and grey, picturesquely blended in the pale October sunshine, made a harmony of colour with the fertile lowland, where the vast fallows were green as stagnant water. Not a tree stirred, not a bird—death in the plain, silence in the forest; a thought in the priest's mind, as yet unuttered, was to be the sole comment on that dumb beauty. A streak of smoke rose here and there from the thatched roofs of the village. The château seemed sombre as its mistress's mood, for there is a mysterious law of uniformity, in virtue of which the house takes its character from the dominant nature within it, a subtle presence which hovers throughout. The sense of the curé's words had reached Mme. Graslin's brain; they had gone to her heart with all the force of conviction; the angelic resonance of his voice had stirred her tenderness; she stopped suddenly short. The curé stretched his arm out towards the forest; Véronique looked at him.

'Do you not see a dim resemblance between this and the life of humanity? His own fate for each of us! And what unequal lots there are among that mass of trees. Those on the highest ground have poorer soil and less water; they are the first to die——'

'And some are *cut down in the grace of their youth by some woman* gathering wood!' she said bitterly.

'Do not give way to those feelings again,' he answered firmly, but with indulgence in his manner. 'The forest

has not been cut down, and that has been its ruin. Do you see something yonder there among the dense forest?'

Véronique could scarcely distinguish between the usual and unusual in a forest, but she obediently looked in the required direction, and then timidly at the curé.

'Do you not observe,' he said, seeing in that glance that Véronique did not understand, 'that there are strips where all the trees of every kind are still green?'

'Oh, so there are!' she cried. 'How is it?'

'In those strips of green lies a fortune for Montégnac and for you—a vast fortune, as I pointed out to M. Graslin. You can see three furrows; those are three valleys, the streams there are lost in the torrent-bed of the Gabou. The Gabou is the boundary line between us and the next commune. All through September and October it is dry, but when November comes it will be full. All that water runs to waste; but it would be easy to make one or two weirs across from side to side of the valley to keep back the water (as Riquet did at Saint-Ferréol, where there are huge reservoirs which supply the Languedoc canal); and it would be easy to increase the volume of the water by turning several little streams in the forest into the river. Wisely distributing it as required, by means of sluices and irrigation trenches, the whole plain can be brought into cultivation, and the overflow, besides, could be turned into our little river.

'You will have fine poplars along all the channels, and you will raise cattle in the finest possible meadows. What is grass but water and sun? You could grow corn in the plain, there is quite enough depth of earth; with so many trenches there will be moisture to enrich the soil; the poplar-trees will flourish along the channels and attract the rain clouds, and the fields will absorb the principles of the rain: these are the secrets of the luxuriant greenness of the valleys. Some day you will see life and joy and stir instead of this prevailing silence and barren dreariness. Will not this be a noble prayer?

Will not these things occupy your idleness better than melancholy broodings?'

Véronique grasped the curé's hand, and made but a brief answer, but that answer was grand—

'It shall be done, monsieur.'

'You have a conception of this great thing,' he began again, 'but you will not carry it out yourself. Neither you nor I have knowledge enough for the realisation of a thought which might occur to any one, but that raises immense practical difficulties; for simple and almost invisible as those difficulties are, they call for the most accurate skill of science. So to-morrow begin your search for the human instruments which, in a dozen years' time, will contrive that the six thousand acres thus brought into cultivation shall yield you an income of six or seven thousand louis d'or. The undertaking will make Montégnac one of the richest communes in the department some day. The forest brings in nothing as yet; but sooner or later buyers will come here for the splendid timber, treasures slowly accumulated by time, the only treasures which man cannot procure save by patient waiting, and cannot do without. Perhaps some day (who knows) the Government will take steps to open up ways of transporting timber grown here to its dockyards; but the Government will wait until Montégnac is ten times its present size before giving its fostering aid; for the Government, like Fortune, gives only to those who have. By that time this estate will be one of the finest in France; it will be the pride of your grandson, who may possibly find the château too small in proportion to his income.'

'That is a future for me to live for,' said Véronique.

'Such a work might redeem many errors,' said the curé.

Seeing that he was understood, he endeavoured to send a last shaft home by way of her intelligence; he had divined that in the woman before him the heart

could only be reached through the brain; whereas, in other women, the way to the brain lies through the heart.

'Do you know what a great mistake you are making?' he asked, after a pause.

She looked at him with frightened eyes.

'Your repentance as yet is only the consciousness of a defeat. If there is anything fearful, it is the despair of Satan; and perhaps man's repentance was like this before Jesus Christ came on earth. But for us Catholics, repentance is the horror which seizes on a soul hurrying on its downward course, and in that shock God reveals Himself. You are like a Pagan Orestes; become a Saint Paul!'

'Your words have just wrought a complete change in me,' she cried. 'Now, oh! I want to live!'

'The spirit has overcome,' the humble priest said to himself, as he went away, glad at heart. He had found food for the secret despair which was gnawing Mme. Graslin, by giving to her repentance the form of a good and noble deed.

The very next day, therefore, Veronique wrote to M. Grossetête, and in answer to her letter three saddle-horses arrived from Limoges for her in less than a week. M. Bonnet made inquiries, and sent the postmaster's son to the château; the young fellow, Maurice Champion by name, was only too pleased to put himself at Mme. Graslin's disposal, with a chance of earning some fifty crowns. Veronique took a liking for the lad—round-faced, black-eyed, and black-haired, short, and well built—and he was at once installed as groom; he was to ride out with his mistress and to take charge of the horses.

The head forester at Montégnac was a native of Limoges, an old quartermaster in the Royal Guard. He had been transferred from another estate when the Duc de Navarreins began to think of selling the

Montégnac lands, and wanted information to guide him in the matter; but in Montégnac Forest Jerome Colorat only saw waste land, never likely to come under cultivation, timber valueless for lack of means of transport, gardens run wild, and a castle in ruins, calling for a vast outlay if it was to be set in order and made habitable. He saw wide rock-strewn spaces and conspicuous grey patches of granite even in the forest, and the honest but unintelligent servant took fright at these things. This was how the property had come into the market.

Mme. Graslin sent for this forester.

'Colorat,' she said, 'I shall most probably ride out to-morrow morning and every following day. You should know the different bits of outlying land which M. Graslin added to the estate, and you must point them out to me; I want to see everything for myself.'

The servants at the château were delighted at this change in Véronique's life. Aline found out her mistress's old black riding habit, and mended it, without being told to do so, and next morning, with inexpressible pleasure, Mme. Sauviat saw her daughter dressed for a riding excursion. With Champion and the forester as her guides, Mme. Graslin set herself first of all to climb the heights. She wanted to understand the position of the slopes and the glens, the natural roadways cleft in the long ridge of the mountain. She would measure her task, study the course of the streams, and see the rough material of the curé's schemes. The forester and Champion were often obliged to consult their memories, for the mountain paths were scarcely visible in that wild country. Colorat went in front, and Champion followed a few paces from her side.

So long as they kept to the denser forest, climbing and descending the continual undulations of a French mountain district, its wonders filled Véronique's mind.

The mighty trees which had stood for centuries amazed her, until she saw so many that they ceased to be a surprise. Then others succeeded, full grown and ready for felling; or in a forest clearing some single pine risen to giant height; or, stranger still, some common shrub, a dwarf growth elsewhere, here risen, under some unusual conditions, to the height of a tree near as old as the soil in which it grew. The wreaths of mist rolling over the bare rocks filled her with indescribable feelings. Higher yet, pale furrows cut by the melting snows looked like scars far up on the mountain sides; there were bleak ravines in which no plant grew, hillside slopes where the soil had been washed away, leaving bare the rock clefts, where the hundred-year-old chestnuts grew straight and tall as pines in the Alps; sometimes they went by vast shifting sands, or boggy places where the trees are few; by fallen masses of granite, overhanging crags, dark glens, wide stretches of burnt grass or moor, where the heather was still in bloom, arid and lonely spots where the caper grows and the juniper, then through meadows covered with fine short grass, where the rich alluvial soil had been brought down and deposited century after century by the mountain torrents; in short, this rapid ride gave her something like a bird's-eye view of the land, a glimpse of the dreariness and grandeur, the strength and sweetness, of nature's wilder moods in the mountain country of midland France. And by dint of gazing at these pictures so various in form, but instinct with the same thought, the deep sadness expressed by the wild ruined land in its barrenness and neglect passed into her own thoughts, and found a response in her secret soul. As, through some gap in the woods, she looked down on the grey stretch of plain below, or when their way led up some parched ravine where a few stunted shrubs starved among the boulders and the sand, by sheer reiteration of the same sights she fell under the influence of this stern

scenery; it called up new ideas in her mind, stirred to a sense of the significance underlying these outward and visible forms. There is no spot in a forest but has this inner sense, not a clearing, not a thicket, but has an analogy in the labyrinth of the human thought.

Who is there with a thinking brain or a wounded heart that can pass through a forest and find the forest dumb? Before you are aware its voice is in your ears, a soothing or an awful voice, but more often soothing than awful. And if you were to examine very closely into the causes of this sensation, this solemn, incomplex, subduing, and mysterious forest-influence that comes over you, perhaps you will find its source in the sublime and subtle effect of the presence of so many creatures all obedient to their destinies, immovable in submission. Sooner or later the overwhelming sense of the abidingness of nature fills your heart and stirs deeper feelings, until at length you grow restless to find God in it. And so it was that with the silence of the mountain heights about her, out in the pure clear air with the forest scents in it, Véronique recovered, as she told M. Bonnet in the evening, the certainty of Divine mercy. She had glimpses of the possibility of an order of things above and beyond that in which her musings had hitherto revolved. She felt something like happiness. For a long time past she had not known such peace. Could it have been that she was conscious of a certain likeness between this country and the waste and dried-up places in her own soul? Did she look with a certain exultation on the troubles of nature with some thought that matter was punished here for no sin? Certain it is that her inner self was strongly stirred.

More than once Colorat and Champion looked at her, and then at each other, as if for them she were transfigured. One spot in particular that they reached in the steep bed of a dry torrent seemed to Véronique to be unspeakably arid. It was with a certain surprise that

she found herself longing to hear the sound of falling water in those scorching ravines.

'Always to love!' she thought. The words seemed like a reproach spoken aloud by a voice. In confusion she urged her horse blindly up towards the summit of the mountain of the Corrèze, and in spite of her guides dashed up to the top (called the Living Rock), and stood there alone. For several moments she scanned the whole country below her. She had heard the secret voices of so many existences asking to live, and now something took place within her that determined her to devote herself to this work with all the perseverance which she had already displayed to admiration. She tied her horse's bridle to a tree and sat down on a slab of rock. Her eyes wandered over the land where nature showed herself so harsh a step-dame, and felt within her own heart something of the mother's yearning which she had felt over her child. Her half-unconscious meditations, which, to use her own beautiful metaphor, 'had sifted her heart,' had prepared her to receive the sublime teaching of the scene that lay before her.

'It was then,' she told the curé, 'that I understood that our souls need to be tilled quite as much as the land.'

The pale November sunlight shone over the wide landscape, but already a few grey clouds were gathering, driven across the sky by a cold west wind. It was now about three o'clock. Véronique had taken four hours to reach the point; but, as is the wont of those who are gnawed by profound inward misery, she gave no heed to anything without. At that moment her life shared the sublime movement of nature and dilated within her.

'Do not stay up there any longer, madame,' said a man's voice, and something in its tone thrilled her. 'You cannot reach home again in any direction if you do, for the nearest house lies a couple of leagues away, and it is impossible to find your way through the forest

in the dark. And even those risks are nothing compared with the risk you are running where you are; in a few moments it will be deadly cold on the peak; no one knows the why or wherefore, but it has been the death of many a one before now.'

Mme. Graslin, looking down, saw a face almost black with sunburn, and two eyes that gleamed from it like tongues of fire. A shock of brown hair hung on either side of the face, and a long pointed beard wagged beneath it. The owner of the face respectfully raised one of the great broad-brimmed hats which the peasantry wear in the midland districts of France, and displayed a bald but magnificent brow, such as sometimes in a poor man compels the attention of passers-by. Véronique felt not the slightest fear; for a woman in such a position as hers, all the petty considerations which cause feminine tremors have ceased to exist.

'How did you come there?' she asked him.

'I live here, hard by,' the stranger answered.

'And what do you do in this out-of-the-way place?' asked Véronique.

'I live in it.'

'But how, and on what do you live?'

'They pay me a trifle for looking after this part of the forest,' he said, pointing to the slopes of the peak opposite the plains of Montégnac. As he moved, Mme. Graslin caught sight of a game-bag and the muzzle of a gun, and any misgivings she might have entertained vanished forthwith.

'Are you a keeper?'

'No, madame. You can't be a keeper until you have been sworn, and you can't take the oath unless you have all your civic rights——'

'Then, who are you?'

'I am Farrabesche,' said the man, in deep humility, with his eyes on the ground.

The name told Mme. Graslin nothing. She looked

at the man before her. In an exceedingly kindly face there were signs of latent savagery; the uneven teeth gave an ironical turn, a suggestion of evil hardihood to the mouth and blood-red lips. In person he was of middle height, broad in the shoulders, short in the neck, which was very full and deeply sunk. He had the large hairy hands characteristic of violent tempered people capable of abusing their physical advantages. His last words suggested some mystery, and his bearing, face, and figure all combined to give to that mystery a terrible interpretation.

'So you are in my employ?' Véronique said gently.

'Then have I the honour of speaking to Mme. Graslin?' asked Farrabesche.

'Yes, my friend,' said she.

Farrabesche vanished with the speed of some wild creature after a frightened glance at his mistress. Véronique hastily mounted and went down to her two servants; the men were growing uneasy about her, for the inexplicable unwholesomeness of the Living Rock was well known in the country. Colorat begged her to go down a little valley into the plain. 'It would be dangerous to return by the higher ground,' he said; the tracks were hard to find, and crossed each other, and in spite of his knowledge of the country, he might lose himself.

Once in the plain, Véronique slackened the pace of her horse.

'Who is this Farrabesche whom you employ?' she asked, turning to the head forester.

'Did madame meet him?' exclaimed Colorat.

'Yes, but he ran away.'

'Poor fellow! Perhaps he does not know how kind madame is.'

'But, after all, what has he done?'

'Why, madame, Farrabesche is a murderer,' Champion blurted out.

'Then, of course, he was pardoned, was he not?' Véronique asked in a tremulous voice.

'No, madame,' Colorat answered. 'Farrabesche was tried at the Assizes, and condemned to ten years' penal servitude; but he only did half his time, for they let him off the rest of the sentence; he came back from the hulks in 1827. He owes his life to M. le Curé, who persuaded him to give himself up. Judged by default, and sentenced to death, they would have caught him sooner or later, and he would have been in a bad way. M. Bonnet went out to look for him at the risk of his life. Nobody knows what he said to Farrabesche; they were alone for a couple of days; on the third he brought Farrabesche back to Tulle, and there he gave himself up. M. Bonnet went to see a clever lawyer, and got him to take up Farrabesche's case; and Farrabesche came off with ten years in jail. M. le Curé used to go to see him while he was in prison; and that fellow yonder, who was a terror to the whole countryside, grew as meek as any maid, and let them take him off to prison quietly. When he came out again, he settled down hereabouts under M. le Curé's direction. People mind what they say to him; he always goes on Sundays and holidays to the services and to mass. He has a seat in the church along with the rest of us, but he always keeps by himself close to the wall. He takes the sacrament from time to time, but at the Communion-table he keeps apart too.'

'And this man has killed another man!'

'*One?*' asked Colorat; 'he has killed a good many, he has! But he is not a bad sort for all that.'

'Is it possible?' cried Véronique, and in her amazement she let the bridle fall on the horse's neck.

The head forester asked nothing better than to tell the tale.

'You see, madame,' he said, 'Farrabesche maybe was in the right at bottom. He was the last of the Farrabesches, an old family in the Corrèze; ay, yes!

His eldest brother, Captain Farrabesche, was killed just ten years before in Italy, at Montenotte; only twenty-two he was, and a captain! That is what you might call bad luck, now, isn't it? And he had a little book-learning too; he could read and write, and he had made up his mind to be a general. They were sorry at home when he died, as well they might be, indeed! I was in the army with *The Other*[1] then; and I heard talk of his death. Oh! Captain Farrabesche fell gloriously; he saved the army, he did, and the Little Corporal! I was serving at that time under General Steingel, a German —that is to say, an Alsatian—a fine soldier he was, but shortsighted, and that was how he came by his end, some time after Captain Farrabesche. The youngest boy, that is the one yonder, was just six years old when he heard them talking about his big brother's death. The second brother went into the army too, but he went as a private soldier; and died a sergeant, first regiment of the Guard, a fine post, at the battle of Austerlitz, where, you see, madame, they manœuvred us all as smoothly as if it had been review day at the Tuileries. . . . I was there myself. Oh! I was lucky; I went through it all, and never came in for a single wound. . . . Well, then, our Farrabesche, the youngest, brave though he was, took it into his head that he would not go for a soldier. And 'tis a fact, the army did not suit that family. When the *sous-prefet* wanted him in 1811, he took to the woods; a 'refractory conscript,' eh! that's what they used to call them. Thereupon a gang of *chauffeurs* got hold of him by fair means or foul, and he took to warming people's feet at last! You understand that no one except M. le Curé knows what he did along with those rascals, asking their pardon! Many a brush he had with the gendarmes, and the regular troops as well! First and last he has seen seven skirmishes.'

[1] *L'Autre*, viz. Napoleon.

'People say that he killed two soldiers and three gendarmes!' put in Champion.

'Who is to know how many?' Colorat answered. 'He did not tell them. At last, madame, almost all the others were caught; but he, an active young fellow, knowing the country as he did, always got away. That gang of *chauffeurs* used to hang on the outskirts of Brives and Tulle, and they would often come over here to lie low, because Farrabesche knew places where they could hide easily. After 1814 nobody troubled about him any more, the conscription was abolished; but he had to spend the year 1815 in the woods. As he could not sit down with his arms folded and live, he helped once more to stop a coach down below yonder in the ravine; but in the end he took M. le Curé's advice, and gave himself up. It was not easy to find witnesses; nobody dared give evidence against him. Then M. le Curé and his lawyer worked so hard for him, that they let him off with ten years. He was lucky after being a *chauffeur*, for a *chauffeur* he was.'

'But what is a *chauffeur*?'

'If you like, madame, I will just tell you the sort of thing they did, by all that I can make out from one and another, for you will understand that I was never a *chauffeur* myself. It was not nice, but necessity knows no law. It was like this: if they suspected some farmer or landowner of having money in his possession, seven or eight of them would drop in in the middle of the night, and they would light a fire and have supper there and then; when supper was over, if the master of the house would not give them as much money as they asked, they would tie his feet up to the pot-hook at the back of the fire, and would not let him go until they had what they asked for. That was all. They came in masks. With so many expeditions, there were a few mishaps. Lord! yes; there are obstinate folk and stingy people everywhere. There was a farmer once, old Cochegrue, a regular skin-

flint he was, he let them burn his feet; and, well, the man died of it. There was M. David's wife too, not far from Brives; she died afterwards of the fright they gave her, simply seeing them tie her husband's feet. "Just give them what you have!" she said to him as she went. He would not, and she showed them the hiding-place. For five years the *chauffeurs* were the terror of the countryside; but get this well into your pate—I beg pardon, madame!—that more than one of them belonged to good families, and that sort of people are not the ones to let themselves be nabbed.'

Mme. Graslin listened and made no reply. There was a moment's pause; then young Champion, eager to interest his mistress in his turn, was anxious to tell what he knew of Farrabesche.

'Madame ought to hear the whole truth of the matter. Farrabesche has not his match on horseback or afoot. He will fell an ox with a blow of his fist! He can carry seven hundred-weight, that he can! and there is not a better shot anywhere. When I was a little chap they used to tell me tales about Farrabesche. One day he and three of his comrades were surprised; they fought till one was killed and two were wounded; well and good, Farrabesche saw that he was caught; bah! he jumps on a gendarme's horse behind the man, claps spurs to the animal, which bolts off at a furious gallop and is out of sight, he gripping that gendarme round the waist all the time; he hugged the man so tight that after a while he managed to fling him off and ride single in the saddle, so he escaped and came by a horse. And he had the impudence to sell it directly afterwards ten leagues on the other side of Limoges. He lay in hiding for three months after that exploit, and no one could find him. They offered a reward of a hundred louis to any one who would betray him.'

'Another time,' added Colorat, 'as to those hundred louis put on his head by the prefect at Tulle, Farrabesche

put a cousin of his in the way of earning it—Giriex it was, over at Vizay. His cousin denounced him, and seemed as if he meant to give him up. Oh ! he actually gave him up ; and very glad the gendarmes were to take him to Tulle. But he did not go far ; they had to put him in the prison at Lubersac, and he got away the very first night, by way of a hole made by one of the gang, one Gabilleau, a deserter from the 17th, executed at Tulle, who was moved away the night before he expected to escape. A pretty character Farrabesche gained by these adventures. The troop had trusty friends, you know. And, besides, people liked the *chauffeurs*. Lord, they were quite different then from what they are nowadays, jolly fellows every one of them, that spent their money like princes. Just imagine it, madame ; finds the gendarmes on his track one evening, does he ? Well, he slipped through their fingers that time by lying twenty-four hours in a pond in a farmyard, drawing his breath through a hole in the straw at the edge of a dung heap. What did a little discomfort like that matter to him when he had spent whole nights up among the little branches at the very top of a tree where a sparrow could hardly hold, watching the soldiers looking for him, passing and repassing below. Farrabesche was one of the five or six *chauffeurs* whom they never could catch ; for as he was a fellow-countryman, and joined the gang perforce (for, after all, he only took to the woods to escape the conscription), all the women took his part, and that counts for much.'

'So Farrabesche has really killed several men,' Mme. Graslin said again.

'Certainly,' Colorat replied ; 'they even say that it was he who murdered the traveller in the coach in 1812 ; but the courier and postillion, the only witnesses who could have identified him, were dead when he came up for trial.'

'And the robbery ?' asked Mme. Graslin.

'Oh! They took all there was; but the five-and-twenty thousand francs which they found belonged to the Government.'

For another league Mme. Graslin rode on in silence. The sun had set, and in the moonlight the grey plain looked like the open sea. Once or twice Champion and Colorat looked at Mme. Graslin, for her silence made them uneasy, and both were greatly disturbed to see that her eyes were red with much weeping and full of tears, which fell drop by drop and glittered on her cheeks.

'Oh! don't be sorry for him, madame,' said Colorat. 'The fellow led a jolly life, and has had pretty sweethearts. And if the police keep an eye on him now, he is protected by M. le Curé's esteem and friendship; for he repented, and in the convicts' prison he behaved in the most exemplary way. Everybody knows that he is as good as the best among us; only he is so proud, he has no mind to lay himself open to any slight, but he lives peaceably and does good after his fashion. Over the other side of the Living Rock he has ten acres or so of young saplings of his own planting; and when he sees a place for a tree in the forest, he will stick one of them in. Then he lops off the dead branches, and collects the wood, and does it up in faggots ready for poor people. And the poor people, knowing that they can have firewood all ready for the asking, go to him instead of helping themselves and damaging your woods. So if he still "warms people's feet," as you may say, it does them good now. Farrabesche is fond of your forest; he looks after it as if it were his own.'

'And yet he lives! . . . quite alone.' Mme. Graslin hastily added the last two words.

'Asking your pardon, madame, no. He is bringing up a little lad; going fifteen now he is,' said Maurice Champion.

'Faith, yes, that he is,' Colorat remarked, 'for La

Curieux had that child a good while before Farrabesche gave himself up.'

'Is it his son?' asked Mme. Graslin.

'Well, every one thinks so.'

'And why did he not marry the girl?'

'Why? Because they would have caught him! And, besides, when La Curieux knew that he was condemned, she left the neighbourhood, poor thing.'

'Was she pretty?'

'Oh, my mother says that she was very much like—dear me! another girl who left the place too—very much like Denise Tascheron.'

'Was he loved?' asked Mme. Graslin.

'Bah! yes, because he was a *chauffeur*!' said Colorat. 'The women always fall in love with anything out of the way. But for all that, nothing astonished people hereabouts so much as this love affair. Catherine Curieux was a good girl who lived like a virgin saint; she was looked on as a paragon of virtue in her neighbourhood over at Vizay, a large village in the Corrèze, on the boundary of two departments. Her father and mother were tenants of M. Brézac's. Catherine Curieux was quite seventeen years old at the time of Farrabesche's sentence. The Farrabesches were an old family out of the same district, but they settled on the Montégnac lands; they had the largest farm in the village. Farrabesche's father and mother are dead now, and La Curieux's three sisters are married; one lives at Aubusson, one at Limoges, and one at Saint-Léonard.'

'Do you think that Farrabesche knows where Catherine is?' asked Mme. Graslin.

'If he knew, he would break his bounds. Oh! he would go to her. . . . As soon as he came back he asked her father and mother (through M. Bonnet) for the child. La Curieux's father and mother were taking care of the child; M. Bonnet persuaded them to give him up to Farrabesche.'

'Does nobody know what became of her?'

'Bah!' said Colorat. 'The lass thought herself ruined, she was afraid to stop in the place! She went to Paris. What does she do there? That is the rub. As for looking for her in Paris, you might as well try to find a marble among the flints there in the plain.'

Colorat pointed to the plain of Montégnac as he spoke. By this time Mme. Graslin was only a few paces from the great gateway of the château. Mme. Sauviat, in anxiety, was waiting there for her with Aline and the servants; they did not know what to think of so long an absence.

'Well,' said Mme. Sauviat, as she helped her daughter to dismount, 'you must be horribly tired.'

'No, dear mother,' Mme. Graslin answered, in an unsteady voice, and Mme. Sauviat, looking at her daughter, saw that she had been weeping for a long time.

Mme. Graslin went into the house with Aline, her confidential servant, and shut herself into her room. She would not see her mother; and when Mme. Sauviat tried to enter, Aline met the old Auvergnate with 'Madame is asleep.'

The next morning Véronique set out on horseback, with Maurice as her sole guide. She took the way by which they had returned the evening before, so as to reach the Living Rock as quickly as might be. As they climbed up the ravine which separates the last ridge in the forest from the actual summit of the mountain (for the Living Rock, seen from the plain, seems to stand alone), Véronique bade Maurice show her the way to Farrabesche's cabin and wait with the horses until she came back. She meant to go alone. Maurice went with her as far as a pathway which turned off towards the opposite side of the Living Rock, furthest from the plain, and pointed out the thatched roof of a cottage half hidden on the mountain side; below it lay the nursery-ground of which Colorat had spoken.

It was almost noon. A thin streak of smoke rising from the cottage chimney guided Véronique, who soon reached the place, but would not show herself at first. At the sight of the little dwelling, and the garden about it, with its fence of dead thorns, she stood for a few moments lost in thoughts known to her alone. Several acres of grass land, enclosed by a quickset hedge, wound away beyond the garden; the low spreading branches of apple and pear and plum trees were visible here and there in the field. Above the house, on the sandier soil of the high mountain slopes, there rose a splendid grove of tall chestnut trees, their topmost leaves turned yellow and sere.

Mme. Graslin pushed open the crazy wicket which did duty as a gate, and saw before her the shed, the little yard, and all the picturesque and living details of the dwellings of the poor. Something surely of the grace of the open fields hovers about them. Who is there that is not moved by the revelation of lowly, almost vegetative lives—the clothes drying on the hedge, the rope of onions hanging from the roof, the iron cooking pots set out in the sun, the wooden bench hidden among the honeysuckle leaves, the houseleeks that grow on the ridges of almost every thatched hovel in France?

Véronique found it impossible to appear unannounced in her keeper's cottage, for two fine hunting-dogs began to bark as soon as they heard the rustle of her riding-habit on the dead leaves; she gathered up her skirts on her arm, and went towards the house. Farrabesche and the boy were sitting on a wooden bench outside. Both rose to their feet and uncovered respectfully, but without a trace of servility.

'I have been told that you are seeing after my interests,' said Véronique, with her eyes fixed on the lad; 'so I determined to see your cottage and nursery of saplings for myself, and to ask you about some improvements.'

'I am at your service, madame,' replied Farrabesche.

Véronique was admiring the lad. It was a charming face; somewhat sunburned and brown, but in shape a faultless oval; the outlines of the forehead were delicately fine, the orange-coloured eyes exceedingly bright and alert; the long dark hair, parted on the forehead, fell upon either side of the brow. Taller than most boys of his age, he was very nearly five feet high. His trousers were of the same coarse brown linen as his shirt; he wore a threadbare waistcoat of rough blue cloth with horn buttons, a short jacket of the material facetiously described as 'Maurienne velvet,' in which Savoyards are wont to dress, and a pair of iron-bound shoes on his otherwise bare feet to complete the costume. His father was dressed in the same fashion; but instead of the little lad's brown woollen cap, Farrabesche wore the wide-brimmed peasant's hat. In spite of its quick intelligence, the child's face wore the look of gravity (evidently unforced) peculiar to young creatures brought up in solitude; he must have put himself in harmony with the silence and the life of the forest. Indeed, in both Farrabesche and his son the physical side of their natures seemed to be the most highly developed; they possessed the peculiar faculties of the savage—the keen sight, the alertness, the complete mastery of the body as an instrument, the quick hearing, the signs of activity and intelligent skill. No sooner did the boy's eyes turn to his father than Mme. Graslin divined that here was the limitless affection in which the prompting of natural instinct and deliberate thought were confirmed by the most effectual happiness.

'Is this the child of whom I have heard?' asked Véronique, indicating the lad.

'Yes, madame.'

Véronique signed to Farrabesche to come a few paces away. 'But have you taken no steps towards finding his mother?' she asked.

'Madame does not know, of course, that I am not allowed to go beyond the bounds of the commune where I am living——'

'And have you never heard of her?'

'When my time was out,' he said, 'the commissary paid over to me the sum of a thousand francs, which had been sent me, a little at a time, every quarter; the rules would not allow me to have it until I came out. I thought that no one but Catherine would have thought of me, as it was not M. Bonnet who sent it; so I am keeping the money for Benjamin.'

'And how about Catherine's relations?'

'They thought no more about her after she went away. Besides, they did their part by looking after the child.'

Véronique turned to go towards the house.

'Very well, Farrabesche,' she said; 'I will have inquiry made, so as to make sure that Catherine is still living, and where she is, and what kind of life she is leading——'

'Madame, whatever she may be, I shall look upon it as good fortune to have her for my wife,' the man cried in a softened tone. 'It is for her to show reluctance, not for me. Our marriage will legitimate the poor boy, who has no suspicion yet of how he stands.'

The look in the father's eyes told the tale of the life these two outcasts led in their voluntary exile; they were all in all to each other, like two fellow-countrymen in the midst of a desert.

'So you love Catherine?' asked Véronique.

'It is not so much that I love her, madame,' he answered, 'as that, placed as I am, she is the one woman in the world for me.'

Mme. Graslin turned swiftly, and went as far as the chestnut-trees, as if some pang had shot through her. The keeper thought that this was some whim of hers, and did not venture to follow. For nearly a quarter of an hour she sat, apparently engaged in looking out over

the landscape. She could see all that part of the forest which lay along the side of the valley, with the torrent in the bottom; it was dry now, and full of boulders, a sort of huge ditch shut in between the forest-covered mountains above Montégnac and another parallel range, these last hills being steep though low, and so bare that there was scarcely so much as a starveling tree here and there to crown the slopes, where a few rather melancholy-looking birches, juniper bushes, and briars were trying to grow. This second range belonged to a neighbouring estate, and lay in the department of the Corrèze; indeed, the cross road which meanders along the winding valley is the boundary line of the *arrondissement* of Montégnac, and also of the two estates. The opposite side of the valley beyond the torrent was quite unsheltered and barren enough. It was a sort of long wall with a slope of fine woodland behind it, and a complete contrast in its bleakness to the side of the mountain on which Farrabesche's cottage stood. Gnarled and twisted forms on the one side, and on the other shapely growths and delicate curving lines; on the one side the dreary, unchanging silence of a sloping desert, held in place by blocks of stone and bare, denuded rocks, and on the other, the contrasts of green among the trees. Many of them were leafless now, but the fine variegated tree trunks stood up straight and tall on each ledge, and the branches waved as the wind stirred through them. A few of them, the oaks, elms, beeches, and chestnuts which held out longer against the autumn than the rest, still retained their leaves—golden, or bronze, or purple.

In the direction of Montégnac the valley opens out so widely that the two sides describe a vast horseshoe. Véronique, with her back against a chestnut-tree, could see glen after glen arranged like the stages of an amphitheatre, the topmost crests of the trees rising one above the other in rows like the heads of spectators. On the other side of the ridge lay her own park, in which, at a

later time, this beautiful hillside was included. Near Farrabesche's cottage the valley grew narrower and narrower, till it closed in as a gully scarce a hundred feet across.

The beauty of the view over which Mme. Graslin's eyes wandered, heedlessly at first, soon recalled her to herself. She went back to the cottage, where the father and son were standing in silence, making no attempt to explain the strange departure of their mistress. Véronique looked at the house. It was more solidly built than the thatched roof had led her to suppose; doubtless it had been left to go to ruin at the time when the Navarreins ceased to trouble themselves about the estate. No sport, no gamekeepers. But though no one had lived in it for a century, the walls held good in spite of the ivy and climbing plants which clung about them on every side. Farrabesche himself had thatched the roof when he received permission to live there; he had laid the stone flags on the floor, and brought in such furniture as there was.

Véronique went inside the cottage. Two beds, such as the peasants use, met her eyes; there was a large cupboard of walnut wood, a hutch for bread, a dresser, a table, three chairs, a few brown earthen platters on the shelves of the dresser; in fact, all the necessary household gear. A couple of guns and a game-bag hung above the mantelshelf. It went to Véronique's heart to see how many things the father had made for the little one; there was a toy man-of-war, a fishing smack, and a carved wooden cup, a chest wonderfully ornamented, a little box decorated with mosaic work in straw, a beautifully-wrought crucifix and rosary. The rosary was made of plum-stones; on each a head had been carved with wonderful skill—Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Madonna, St. John the Baptist, St. Anne, the two Magdalens.

'I did it to amuse the child during the long winter

evenings,' he said, with something of apology in his tone.

Jessamine and climbing roses covered the front of the house, and broke into blossom about the upper windows. Farrabesche used the first floor as a storeroom; he kept poultry, ducks, and a couple of pigs, and bought nothing but bread, salt, sugar, and such groceries as they needed. Neither he nor the lad drank wine.

'Everything that I have seen and heard of you,' Mme. Graslin said at last, turning to Farrabesche, 'has led me to take an interest in you which shall not come to nothing.'

'This is M. Bonnet's doing, I know right well!' cried Farrabesche with touching fervour.

'You are mistaken; M. le Curé has said nothing to me of you as yet; chance or God, it may be, has brought it all about.'

'Yes, madame, it is God's doing; God alone can work wonders for such a wretch as I.'

'If your life has been a wretched one,' said Mme. Graslin, in tones so low that they did not reach the boy (a piece of womanly feeling which touched Farrabesche), 'your repentance, your conduct, and M. Bonnet's good opinion should go far to retrieve it. I have given orders that the buildings on the large farm near the château which M. Graslin planned are to be finished; you shall be my steward there; you will find scope for your energies and employment for your son. The public prosecutor at Limoges shall be informed of your case, and I will engage that the humiliating restrictions which make your life a burden to you shall be removed.'

Farrabesche dropped down on his knees as if thunderstruck at the words which opened out a prospect of the realisation of hopes hitherto cherished in vain. He kissed the hem of Mme. Graslin's riding habit; he kissed her feet. Benjamin saw the tears in his father's eyes, and began to sob without knowing why.

'Do not kneel, Farrabesche,' said Mme. Graslin; 'you do not know how natural it is that I should do for you these things that I have promised to do. . . . Did you not plant those trees,' she added, pointing to one or two pitch-pines, Norway pines, firs, and larches at the base of the arid, thirsty hillside opposite.

'Yes, madame.'

'Then is the soil better just there?'

'The water is always wearing the rocks away, so there is a little light soil washed down on to your land, and I took advantage of it, for all the valley down below the road belongs to you; the road is the boundary line.'

'Then does a good deal of water flow down the length of the valley?'

'Oh! in a few days, madame, if the weather sets in rainy, you will maybe hear the roaring of the torrent over at the château! but even then it is nothing compared with what it will be when the snow melts. All the water from the whole mountain side there at the back of your park and gardens flows into it; in fact, all the streams hereabouts flow down to the torrent, and the water comes down like a deluge. Luckily for you, the tree roots on your side of the valley bind the soil together, and the water slips off the leaves, for the fallen leaves here in autumn are like an oilcloth cover for the land, or it would all be washed down into the valley bottom, and the bed of the torrent is so steep that I doubt whether the soil would stop there.'

'What becomes of all the water?' asked Mme. Graslin.

Farrabesche pointed to the gully which seemed to shut in the valley below his cottage.

'It pours out over a chalky bit of level ground that separates Limousin from the Corrèze, and there it lies for several months in stagnant green pools, sinking slowly down into the soil. That is how the common came to be so unhealthy that no one lives there, and

nothing can be done with it. No kind of cattle will pasture on the reeds and rushes in those brackish pools. Perhaps there are three thousand acres of it altogether; it is the common land of three parishes; but it is just like the plain of Montégnac, you can do nothing with it. And down in your plain there is a certain amount of sand and a little soil among the flints, but here there is nothing but the bare tufa.'

'Send for the horses; I mean to see all this for myself.'

Mme. Graslin told Benjamin where she had left Maurice, and the lad went forthwith.

'They tell me that you know every yard of this country,' Mme. Graslin continued; 'can you explain to me how it happens that no water flows into the plain of Montégnac from my side of the ridge? there is not the smallest torrent there even in rainy weather or in the time of the melting of the snows.'

'Ah! madame,' Farrabesche answered, 'M. le Cure, who is always thinking of the prosperity of Montégnac, guessed the cause, but had not proof of it. Since you came here, he told me to mark the course of every runnel in every little valley. I had been looking at the lie of the land yesterday, and was on my way back when I had the honour of meeting you at the base of the Living Rock. I heard the sound of horse hoofs, and I wanted to know who was passing this way. Madame, M. Bonnet is not only a saint, he is a man of science. "Farrabesche," said he (I being at work at the time on the road which the commune finished up to the château for you)—"Farrabesche, if no water from this side of the hill reaches the plain below, it must be because nature has some sort of drainage arrangement for carrying it off elsewhere."—Well, madame, the remark is so simple that it looks downright trite, as if any child might have made it. But nobody since Montégnac was Montégnac, neither great lords, nor stewards, nor

keepers, nor rich, nor poor, though the plain lay there before their eyes with nothing growing on it for want of water, not one of them ever thought of asking what became of the water in the Gabou. The stagnant water gives them the fever in three communes, but they never thought of looking for the remedy; and I myself never dreamed of it; it took a man of God to see that——'

Farrabesche's eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

'The discoveries of men of genius are all so simple, that every one thinks he could have found them out,' said Mme. Graslin; and to herself she added, 'But there is this grand thing about genius, that while it is akin to all others, no one resembles it.'

'At once I saw what M. Bonnet meant,' Farrabesche went on. 'He had not to use a lot of long words to explain my job to me. To make the thing all the queerer, madame, all the ridge above your plain (for it all belongs to you) is full of pretty deep cracks, ravines, and gullies, and what not; but all the water that flows down all the valleys, clefts, ravines, and gorges, every channel, in fact, empties itself into a little valley a few feet lower than the level of your plain, madame. I know the cause of this state of things to-day, and here it is: There is a sort of embankment of rock (*schist*, M. Bonnet calls it) twenty to thirty feet thick, which runs in an unbroken line all round the bases of the hills between Montégnac and the Living Rock. The earth, being softer than the stone, has been worn away and been hollowed out; so, naturally, the water all flows round into the Gabou, eating its passage out of each valley. The trees and thickets and brushwood hide the lie of the land; but when you follow the streams and track their passage, it is easy to convince yourself of the facts. In this way both hillsides drain into the Gabou, all the water from this side that we see, and the other over the ridge where your park lies, as well as from the rocks

opposite. M. le Curé thinks that this state of things would work its own cure when the water-courses on your side of the ridge are blocked up at the mouth by the rocks and soil washed down from above, so that they raise barriers between themselves and the Gabou. When that time comes your plain will be flooded in turn like the common land you are just about to see; but it would take hundreds of years to bring that about. And besides, is it a thing to wish for, madame? Suppose that your plain of Montégnac should not suck up all that water, like the common land here, there would be some more standing pools there to poison the whole country.'

'So the places M. le Curé pointed out to me a few days ago, where the trees are still green, must mark the natural channels through which the water flows down into the Gabou?'

'Yes, madame. There are three hills between the Living Rock and Montégnac, and consequently there are three watercourses, and the streams that flow down them, banked in by the schist barrier, turn to the Gabou. That belt of wood still green, round the base of the hills, looks as if it were part of your plain, but it marks the course of the channel which was there, as M. le Curé guessed it would be.'

'The misfortune will soon turn to a blessing for Montégnac,' said Mme. Graslin, with deep conviction in her tones. 'And since you have been the first instrument, you shall share in the work; you shall find active and willing workers, for hard work and perseverance must make up for the money which we lack.'

Mme. Graslin had scarcely finished the sentence when Benjamin and Maurice came up; she caught at her horse's bridle, and, by a gesture, bade Farrabesche mount Maurice's horse.

'Now bring me to the place where the water drowns the common land,' she said.

'It will be so much the better that you should go, madame,

since that the late M. Graslin, acting on M. Bonnet's advice, bought about three hundred acres of land at the mouth of the gully where the mud has been deposited by the torrent, so that over a certain area there is some depth of rich soil. Madame will see the other side of the Living Rock; there is some magnificent timber there, and doubtless M. Graslin would have had a farm on the spot. The best situation would be a place where the little stream that rises near my house sinks into the ground again; it might be turned to advantage.'

Farrabesche led the way, and Véronique followed down a steep path towards a spot where the two sides of the gully drew in, and then separated sharply to east and west, as if divided by some earthquake shock. The gully was about sixty feet across. Tall grasses were growing among the huge boulders in the bottom. On the one side the Living Rock, cut to the quick, stood up a solid surface of granite without the slightest flaw in it; but the height of the uncompromising rock wall was crowned with the overhanging roots of trees, for the pines clutched the soil with their branching roots, seeming to grasp the granite as a bird clings to a bough; but on the other side the rock was yellow and sandy, and hollowed out by the weather; there was no depth in the caverns, no boldness in the hollows of the soft crumbling ochre-tinted rock. A few prickly-leaved plants, burdocks, reeds, and water-plants at its base were sufficient signs of a north aspect and poor soil. Evidently the two ranges, though parallel, and as it were blended at the time of the great cataclysm which changed the surface of the globe, were composed of entirely different materials—an inexplicable freak of nature, or the result of some unknown cause which waits for genius to discover it. In this place the contrast between them was most strikingly apparent.

Véronique saw in front of her a vast dry plateau. There was no sign of plant-life anywhere; the chalky

soil explained the infiltration of the water, only a few stagnant pools remained here and there where the surface was incrusted. To the right stretched the mountains of the Corrèze, and to the left the eye was arrested by the huge mass of the Living Rock, the tall forest trees that clothed its sides, and two hundred acres of grass below the forest, in strong contrast with the ghastly solitude about them.

'My son and I made the ditch that you see down yonder,' said Farrabesche; 'you can see it by the line of tall grass; it will be connected shortly with the ditch that marks the edge of your forest. Your property is bounded on this side by a desert, for the first village lies a league away.'

Véronique galloped into the hideous plain, and her keeper followed. She cleared the ditch and rode at full speed across the dreary waste, seeming to take a kind of wild delight in the vast picture of desolation before her. Farrabesche was right. No skill, no human power could turn that soil to account, the ground rang hollow beneath the horses' hoofs. This was a result of the porous nature of the tufa, but there were cracks and fissures no less through which the flood water sank out of sight, doubtless to feed some far-off springs.

'And yet there are souls like this!' Véronique exclaimed within herself as she reined in her horse, after a quarter of an hour's gallop.

She mused a while with the desert all about her; there was no living creature, no animal, no insect; birds never crossed the plateau. In the plain of Montégnac there were at any rate the flints, a little sandy or clayey soil, and crumbled rock to make a thin crust of earth a few inches deep as a beginning for cultivation; but here the ungrateful tufa, which had ceased to be earth, and had not become stone, wearied the eyes so cruelly that they were absolutely forced to turn for relief to the illimitable ether of space. Véronique looked along the boundary of

her forests and at the meadow which her husband had added to the estate, then she went slowly back towards the mouth of the Gabou. She came suddenly upon Farrabesche, and found him looking into a hole, which might have suggested that some one of a speculative turn had been probing this unlikely spot, imagining that nature had hidden some treasure there.

'What is it?' asked Véronique, noticing the deep sadness of the expression on the manly face.

'Madame, I owe my life to this trench here, or, more properly, I owe to it a space for repentance and time to redeem my faults in the eyes of men——'

The effect of this explanation of life was to nail Mme. Graslin to the spot. She reined in her horse.

'I used to hide here, madame. The ground is so full of echoes, that if I laid my ear to the earth I could catch the sound of the horses of the gendarmerie or the tramp of soldiers (an unmistakable sound that!) more than a league away. Then I used to escape by way of the Gabou. I had a horse ready in a place there, and I always put five or six leagues between myself and them that were after me. Catherine used to bring me food of a night. If she did not find any sign of me, I always found bread and wine left in a hole covered over by a stone.'

These recollections of his wild vagrant life, possibly unwholesome recollections for Farrabesche, stirred Véronique's most indulgent pity, but she rode rapidly on towards the Gabou, followed by the keeper. While she scanned the gap, looking down the long valley, so fertile on one side, so forlorn on the other, and saw, more than a league away, the hillside ridges, tier on tier, at the back of Montégnac, Farrabesche said, 'There will be famous waterfalls here in a few days.'

'And by the same day next year, not a drop of water will ever pass that way again. I am on my own property on either side, so I shall build a wall solid enough and high

enough to keep the water in. Instead of a valley which is doing nothing, I shall have a lake, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty feet deep, and about a league across—a vast reservoir for the irrigation channels that shall fertilise the whole plain of Montégnac.'

'M. le Curé was right, madame, when he told us, as we were finishing your road, that we were working for our mother; may God give His blessing to such an enterprise.'

'Say nothing about it, Farrabesche,' said Mme. Graslin; 'it is M. Bonnet's idea.'

Véronique returned to Farrabesche's cottage, found Maurice, and went back at once to the château. Her mother and Aline were surprised at the change in her face; the hope of doing good to the country had given it a look of something like happiness. Mme. Graslin wrote to M. Grossetête; she wanted him to ask M. de Granville for complete liberty for the poor convict, giving particulars as to his good conduct, which was further vouched for by the mayor's certificate and a letter from M. Bonnet. She also sent other particulars concerning Catherine Curieux, and entreated Grossetête to interest the public prosecutor in her kindly project, and to cause a letter to be written to the prefecture of police in Paris with a view to discovering the girl. The mere fact that Catherine had remitted sums of money to the convict in prison should be a sufficient clue by which to trace her. Véronique had set her heart on knowing the reason why Catherine had failed to come back to her child and to Farrabesche. Then she told her old friend of her discoveries in the torrent-bed of the Gabou, and laid stress on the necessity of finding the clever man for whom she had already asked him.

The next day was Sunday. For the first time since Véronique took up her abode in Montégnac, she felt able to go to church for mass. She went and took possession of her pew in the Lady Chapel. Looking round her, she

saw how bare the poverty-stricken church was, and determined to set by a certain sum every year for repairs and the decoration of the altars. She heard the words of the priest, tender, gracious and divine; for the sermon, couched in such simple language that all present could understand it, was in truth sublime. The sublime comes from the heart; it is not to be found by effort of the intellect; and religion is an inexhaustible source of sublime thoughts with no false glitter of brilliance, for the catholicism which penetrates and changes hearts is wholly of the heart. M. Bonnet found in the epistle a text for his sermon, to the effect that soon or late God fulfils His promises, watches over His own, and encourages the good. He made it clear that great things would be the result of the presence of a rich and charitable resident in the parish, by pointing out that the duties of the poor towards the beneficent rich were as extensive as those of the rich towards the poor, and that the relation should be one of mutual help.

Farrabesche had spoken to some of those who were glad to see him (one consequence of the spirit of Christian charity which M. Bonnet had infused into practical action in his parish), and had told them of Mme. Graslin's kindness to him. All the commune had talked this over in the square below the church, where, according to country custom, they gathered together before mass. Nothing could more completely have won the goodwill of these folk, who are so readily touched by any kindness shown to them; and when Véronique came out of church, she found almost all the parish standing in a double row. All hats went off respectfully and in deep silence as she passed. This welcome touched her, though she did not know the real reason of it. Among the last of all she saw Farrabesche, and spoke to him.

'You are a good sportsman; do not forget to send us some game.'

A few days after this Véronique walked with the curé in that part of the forest nearest her château; she determined to descend the ridges which she had seen from the Living Rock, ranged tier on tier on the other side of the hill. With the curé's assistance, she would ascertain the exact position of the higher affluents of the Gabou. The result was the discovery by the curé of the fact that the streams which water Upper Montégnac really rose in the mountains of the Corrèze. These ranges were united to the mountain by the arid rib of hill which ran parallel to the chain of the Living Rock. The curé came back from that walk with boyish glee; he saw, with the *naïveté* of a poet, the prosperity of the village that he loved. And what is a poet but a man who realises his dreams before the time? M. Bonnet reaped his harvests as he looked down from the terrace at the barren plain.

Farrabesche and his son came up to the château next morning loaded with game. The keeper had brought a cup for Francis Graslin; it was nothing less than a masterpiece—a battle scene carved on a cocoa-nut shell. Mme. Graslin happened to be walking on the terrace, on the side that overlooked 'Tascherons.' She sat down on a garden seat, and looked long at that fairy's work. Tears came into her eyes from time to time.

'You must have been very unhappy,' she said, addressing Farrabesche after a silence.

'What could I do, madame,' he answered. 'I was there without the hope of escape, which makes life bearable to almost all the convicts——'

'It is an appalling life!' she said, and her look and compassionate tones invited Farrabesche to speak.

In Mme. Graslin's convulsive tremor and evident emotion Farrabesche saw nothing but the overwrought interest excited by pitying curiosity. Just at that moment Mme. Sauviat appeared in one of the garden walks, and seemed about to join them, but Véronique

drew out her handkerchief and motioned her away. 'Let me be, mother,' she cried, in sharper tones than she had ever before used to the old Auvergnate.

'For five years I wore a chain riveted here to a heavy iron ring, madame,' Farrabesche said, pointing to his leg. 'I was fastened to another man. I have had to live like that with three convicts first and last. I used to lie on a wooden camp bedstead, and I had to work uncommonly hard to get a thin mattress, called a *serpentin*. There were eight hundred men in each ward. Each of the beds (*tolards*, they called them) held twenty-four men, all chained together two and two, and nights and mornings they passed a long chain called the "bilboes string," in and out of the chains that bound each couple together, and made it fast to the *tolard*, so that all of us were fastened down by the feet. Even after a couple of years of it, I could not get used to the clank of those chains; every moment they said, "You are in a convicts' prison!" If you dropped off to sleep for a minute, some rogue or other would begin to wrangle or turn himself round, and put you in mind of your plight. You had to serve an apprenticeship to learn how to sleep. I could not sleep at all, in fact, unless I was utterly exhausted with a heavy day's work.

'After I managed to sleep, I had, at any rate, the night when I could forget things. Forgetfulness—that is something, madame! Once a man is there, he must learn to satisfy his needs after a manner fixed by the most pitiless rules. You can judge, madame, what sort of effect this life was like to have on me, a young fellow who had always lived in the woods, like the wild goats and the birds! Ah! if I had not eaten my bread cooped up in the four walls of a prison for six months beforehand, I should have thrown myself into the sea at the sight of my mates, for all the beautiful things M. Bonnet said, and (I may say it) he has been the father of my soul. I did pretty well in the open air; but when once I was

shut up in the ward to sleep or eat (for we ate our food there out of troughs, three couples to each trough), it took all the life out of me; the dreadful faces and the language of the others always sickened me. Luckily, at five o'clock in the summer, and half-past seven in winter, out we went in spite of heat or cold or wind or rain, in the "jail gang"—that means to work. So we were out of doors most of our time, and the open air seems very good to you when you come out of a place where eight hundred convicts herd together. . . . The air, you must always remember, is sea air! You enjoy the breeze, the sun is like a friend, and you watch the clouds pass over, and look for hopeful signs of a beautiful day. For my own part, I took an interest in my work.'

Farrabesche stopped, for two great tears rolled down Véronique's cheeks.

'Oh! madame, these are only the roses of that existence!' he cried, taking the expression on Mme. Graslin's face for pity of his lot. 'There are the dreadful precautions the Government takes to make sure of us, the inquisition kept up by the warders, the inspection of fetters morning and evening, the coarse food, the hideous clothes that humiliate you at every moment, the constrained position while you sleep, the frightful sound of four hundred double chains clanking in an echoing ward, the prospect of being mowed down with grape-shot if half-a-dozen scoundrels take it into their heads to rebel,—all these horrible things are nothing, they are the roses of that life, as I said before. Any respectable man unlucky enough to be sent there must die of disgust before very long. You have to live day and night with another convict; you have to endure the company of five more at every meal, and twenty-three at night; you have to listen to their talk.

'The convicts have secret laws among themselves, madame; if you make an outlaw of yourself, they will murder you; if you submit, you become a murderer.

You have your choice—you must be either victim or executioner. After all, if you die at a blow, that would put an end to you and your troubles; but they are too cunning in wickedness, it is impossible to hold out against their hatred: any one whom they dislike is completely at their mercy, they can make every moment of his life one constant torture worse than death. Any man who repents and tries to behave well is the common enemy, and more particularly they suspect him of tale-telling. They will take a man's life on a mere suspicion of tale-telling. Every ward has its tribunal, where they try crimes against the convicts' laws. It is an offence not to conform to their customs, and a man may be punished for that. For instance, everybody is bound to help the escape of a convict; every convict has his chance of escape in turn, when the whole prison is bound to give him help and protection. It is a crime to reveal anything done by a convict to further his escape. I will not speak of the horrible moral tone of the prison; strictly speaking, it has nothing to do with the subject. The prison authorities chain men of opposite dispositions together, so as to neutralise any attempt at escape or rebellion; and always put those who either could not endure each other, or were suspicious of each other, on the same chain.'

'What did you do?' asked Mme. Graslin.

'Oh! it was like this, I had luck,' said Farrabesche; 'the lot never fell to me to kill a doomed man, I never voted the death of anybody, no matter whom, I was never punished, no one took a dislike to me, and I lived comfortably with the three mates they gave me one after another—all three of them feared and liked me. But then I was well known in the prison before I got there, madame. A *chauffeur*! for I was supposed to be one of those brigands . . . I have seen them do it,' Farrabesche went on in a low voice, after a pause, 'but I never would help to torture folk, nor take any of the stolen money. I was a "refractory conscript," that was all. I used to

help the rest, I was scout for them, I fought, I was forlorn sentinel, rearguard, what you will, but I never shed blood except in self-defence. Oh! I told M. Bonnet and my lawyer everything, and the judges knew quite well that I was not a murderer. But, all the same, I am a great criminal; the things that I have done are all against the law.

'Two of my old comrades had told them about me before I came. I was a man of whom the greatest things might be expected, they said. In the convicts' prison, you see, madame, there is nothing like a character of that kind; it is worth even more than money. A murder is a passport in this republic of wretchedness; they leave you in peace. I did nothing to destroy their opinion of me. I looked gloomy and resigned; it was possible to be misled by my face, and they were misled. My sullen manner and my silence were taken for signs of ferocity. Every one there, convicts and warders, young and old, respected me. I was president of my ward. I was never tormented at night, nor suspected of tale-telling. I lived honestly according to their rules; I never refused to do any one a good turn; I never showed a sign of disgust; in short, I "howled with the wolves," to all appearance, and in my secret soul I prayed to God. My last mate was a soldier, a lad of two-and-twenty, who had stolen something, and then deserted in consequence; I had him for four years. We were friends, and wherever I may be I can reckon on *him* when he comes out. The poor wretch, Guépin they called him, was not a rascal, he was only a hair-brained boy; his ten years will sober him down. Oh! if the rest had known that it was religion that reconciled me to my fate; that when my time was up I meant to live in some corner without letting them know where I was, to forget those fearful creatures, and never to be in the way of meeting one of them again, they would very likely have driven me mad.'

'But, then, suppose that some unhappy, sensitive boy

had been carried away by passion, and—pardoned so far as the death penalty is concerned——?'

'Madame, a murderer is never fully pardoned. They begin by commuting the sentence for twenty years of penal servitude. But for a decent young fellow it is a thing to shudder at! It is impossible to tell you about the life in store for him; it would be a hundred times better for him that he should die! Yes, for such a death on the scaffold is good fortune.'

'I did not dare to think it,' said Mme. Graslin.

Véronique had grown white as wax. She leant her forehead against the balustrade to hide her face for several moments. Farrabesche did not know whether he ought to go or stay. Then Mme. Graslin rose to her feet, and with an almost queenly look she said, to Farrabesche's great astonishment, 'Thank you, my friend!' in tones that went to his heart. Then after a pause—'Where did you draw courage to live and suffer as you did?' she asked.

'Ah, madame, M. Bonnet had set a treasure in my soul! That is why I love him more than I have ever loved any one else in this world.'

'More than Catherine?' asked Mme. Graslin, with a certain bitterness in her smile.

'Ah, madame, almost as much.'

'How did he do it?'

'Madame, the things that he said and the tones of his voice subdued me. It was Catherine who showed him the way to the hiding-place in the chalk-land which I showed you the other day. He came to me quite alone. He was the new curé of Montégnac, he told me; I was his parishioner, I was dear to him, he knew that I had only strayed from the path, that I was not yet lost; he did not mean to betray me, but to save me; in fact, he said things that thrill you to the very depths of your nature. And you see, madame, he can make you do right with all the force that other people take to make

you do wrong. He told me, poor dear man, that Catherine was a mother; I was about to give over two creatures to shame and neglect. "Very well," said I, "then they will be just as I am; I have no future before me." He answered that I had two futures before me, and both of them bad—one in this world, the other in the next—unless I desisted and reformed. Here below I was bound to die on the scaffold. If I were caught, my defence would break down in a court of law. On the other hand, if I took advantage of the mildness of the new Government towards "refractory conscripts" of many years' standing, and gave myself up, he would strain every nerve to save my life. He would find me a clever advocate who would pull me through with ten years' penal servitude. After that M. Bonnet talked to me of another life. Catherine cried like a Magdalen at that. There, madame,' said Farrabesche, holding out his right hand, 'she laid her face against *this*, and I felt it quite wet with her tears. She prayed me to live! M. le Curé promised to contrive a quiet and happy lot for me and for my child, even in this district, and undertook that no one should cast up the past to me. In short, he lectured me as if I had been a little boy. After three of those nightly visits I was as pliant as a glove. Do you care to know why, madame?'

Farrabesche and Mme. Graslin looked at each other, and neither of them to their secret souls explained the real motive of their mutual curiosity.

'Very well,' the poor ticket-of-leave man continued, 'the first time when he had gone away, and Catherine went, too, to show him the way back, and I was left alone, I felt a kind of freshness and calm and happiness such as I had not known since I was a child. It was something like the happiness I had felt with poor Catherine. The love of this dear man, who had come to seek me out, the interest that he took in me, in my future, in my soul—it all worked upon me and changed

me. It was as if a light arose in me. So long as he was with me and talked, I held out. How could I help it? He was a priest, and we bandits do not eat their bread. But when the sound of his footsteps and Catherine's died away—oh! I was, as he said two days later, "enlightened by grace."

'From that time forwards, God gave me strength to endure everything—the jail, the sentence, the putting on of the irons, the journey, the life in the convicts' prison. I reckoned upon M. Bonnet's promise as upon the truth of the Gospel; I looked on my sufferings as a payment of arrears. Whenever things grew unbearable, I used to see, at the end of the ten years, this house in the woods, and my little Benjamin and Catherine there. Good M. Bonnet, he kept his promise; but some one else failed me. Catherine was not at the prison door when I came out, nor yet at the trysting place on the common lands. She must have died of grief. That is why I am always sad. Now, thanks to you, madame, I shall have work to do that needs doing; I shall put myself into it body and soul, so will my boy for whom I live——'

'You have shown me how it was that M. le Curé could bring about the changes in his parish——'

'Oh! nothing can resist him,' said Farrabesche.

'No, no. I know that,' Véronique answered briefly, and she dismissed Farrabesche with a sign of farewell.

Farrabesche went. Most of that day Véronique spent in pacing to and fro along the terrace, in spite of the drizzling rain that fell till evening came on. She was gloomy and sad When Veronique's brows were thus contracted, neither her mother nor Aline dared to break in on her mood; she did not see her mother talking in the dusk with M. Bonnet, who, seeing that she must be roused from this appalling dejection, sent the child to find her. Little Francis went up to his mother and took her hand, and Véronique suffered herself to be led away. At the sight of M. Bonnet she started with

something almost like dismay. The curé led the way back to the terrace.

'Well, madame,' he said, 'what can you have been talking about with Farrabesche?'

Véronique did not wish to lie nor to answer the question; she replied to it by another—

'Was he your first victory?'

'Yes,' said M. Bonnet. 'If I could win him, I felt sure of Montégnac; and so it proved.'

Véronique pressed M. Bonnet's hand.

'From to-day I am your penitent, M. le Curé,' she said, with tears in her voice; 'to-morrow I will make you a general confession.'

The last words plainly spoke of a great inward struggle and a hardly won victory over herself. The curé led the way back to the château without a word, and stayed with her till dinner, talking over the vast improvements to be made in Montégnac.

'Agriculture is a question of time,' he said. 'The little that I know about it has made me to understand how much may be done by a well-spent winter. Here are the rains beginning, you see; before long the mountains will be covered with snow, and your operations will be impossible; so hurry M. Grossetête.'

M. Bonnet exerted himself to talk, and drew Mme. Graslin into the conversation; gradually her thoughts were forced to take another turn, and by the time he left her she had almost recovered from the day's excitement. But even so, Mme. Sauviat saw that her daughter was so terribly agitated that she spent the night with her.

Two days later a messenger sent by M. Grossetête arrived with the following letters for Mme. Graslin:—

Grossetête to Mme. Graslin.

'My dear Child,—Horses are not easily to be found,

but I hope that you are satisfied with the three which I sent you. If you need draught-horses or plough-horses, they must be looked for elsewhere. It is better in any case to use oxen for ploughing and as draught animals. In all districts where they use horses on the land, they lose their capital as soon as the animal is past work, while an ox, instead of being a loss, yields a profit to the farmer.

'I approve your enterprise in every respect, my child; you will find in it an outlet for the devouring mental energy which was turned against yourself and wearing you out. But when you ask me to find you, over and above the horses, a man able to second you, and more particularly to enter into your views, you ask me for one of those rare birds that we rear, it is true, in the provinces, but which we in no case keep among us. The training of the noble animal is too lengthy and too risky a speculation for us to undertake, and besides, we are afraid of these very clever folk—"eccentrics," we call them.

'As a matter of fact, too, the men who are classed in the scientific category in which you are fain to find a co-operator are, as a rule, so prudent and so well provided for, that I hardly liked to write to tell you how impossible it would be to come by such a prize. You asked me for a poet, or, if you prefer it, a madman; but all our madmen betake themselves to Paris. I did speak to one or two young fellows engaged on the land survey and assessments, contractors for embankments, or foremen employed on canal cuttings; but none of them thought it worth their while to entertain your proposals. Chance all at once threw in my way the very man you want, a young man whom I thought to help; for you will see by his letter that one ought not to set about doing a kindness in a happy-go-lucky fashion, and, indeed, an act of kindness requires more thinking about than anything else on this earth. You can never tell whether what seemed to you to be right at the time may not do

harm by and by. By helping others we shape our own destinies; I see that now——'

As Mme. Graslin read those words, the letter dropped from her hands. For some moments she sat deep in thought.

'Oh, God,' she cried, 'when wilt Thou cease to smite me by every man's hand?'

Then she picked up the letters and read on—

'Gérard seems to me to have plenty of enthusiasm and a cool head; the very man for you! Paris is in a ferment just now with this leaven of new doctrine, and I shall be delighted if the young fellow keeps out of the snares spread by ambitious spirits, who work upon the instincts of the generous youth of France. The rather torpid existence of the provinces is not altogether what I like for him, but neither do I like the idea of the excitement of the life in Paris, and the enthusiasm for renovating, which urges youngsters into the new ways. You, and you only, know my opinions; to me it seems that the world of ideas revolves on its axis much as the material world does. Here is this poor protégé of mine wanting impossibilities. No power on earth could stand before ambitions so violent, imperious, and absolute. I have a liking myself for a jog trot; I like to go slowly in politics, and have but very little taste for the social topsy-turvydom which all these lofty spirits are minded to inflict upon us. To you I confide the principles of an old and crusted supporter of the monarchy, for you are discreet. I hold my tongue here among these good folk, who believe more and more in progress the further they get into a mess; but for all that, it hurts me to see the irreparable damage done already to our dear country.

'So I wrote and told the young man that a task worthy of him was waiting for him here. He is coming to see you; for though his letter (which I enclose) will

give you a very fair idea of him, you would like to see him as well, would you not? You women can tell so much from the look of people; and besides, you ought not to have any one, however insignificant, in your service unless you like him. If he is not the man you want, you can decline his services; but if he suits you, dear child, cure him of his flimsily disguised ambitions, induce him to adopt the happy and peaceful life of the fields, a life in which beneficence is perpetual, where all the qualities of great and strong nature are continually brought into play, where the products of Nature are a daily source of new wonder, and a man finds worthy occupation in making a real advance and practical improvements. I do not in any way overlook the fact that great deeds come of great ideas—great theories; but as ideas of that kind are seldom met with, I think that, for the most part, practical attainments are worth more than ideas. A man who brings a bit of land into cultivation, or a tree or fruit to perfection, who makes grass grow where grass would not grow before, ranks a good deal higher than the seeker after formulas for humanity. In what has Newton's science changed the lot of the worker in the fields? . . . Ah! my dear, I loved you before, but to-day, appreciating to the full the task which you have set before you, I love you far more. You are not forgotten here in Limoges, and every one admires your great resolution of improving Montégnac. Give us our little due, in that we have the wit to admire nobility when we see it, and do not forget that the first of your admirers is also your earliest friend.

'F. Grossetête.'

Gérard to Grossetête.

'I come to you, monsieur, with sad confidences, but you have been like a father to me, when you might have been simply a patron. So to you alone who have made

me anything that I am, can I make them. I have fallen a victim to a cruel disease, a disease, moreover, not of the body; I am conscious that I am completely unfitted by my thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and by the whole bent of my mind, to do what is expected of me by the Government and by society. Perhaps this will seem to you to be a piece of ingratitude, but it is simply and solely an indictment that I address to you.

'When I was twelve years old you saw the signs of a certain aptitude for the exact sciences, and a precocious ambition to succeed, in a working man's son, and it was through you, my generous godfather, that I took my flight towards higher spheres; but for you I should be following out my original destiny, I should be a carpenter like my poor father, who did not live to rejoice in my success. And most surely, monsieur, you did me a kindness; there is no day on which I do not bless you; and so, perhaps, it is I who am in the wrong. But whether right or wrong, I am unhappy; and does not the fact that I pour out my complaints to you set you very high? Is it not as if I made of you a supreme judge, like God? In any case, I trust to your indulgence.

'I studied the exact sciences so hard between the ages of sixteen and eighteen that I made myself ill, as you know. My whole future depended on my admission to the École polytechnique. The work I did at that time was a disproportionate training for the intellect; I all but killed myself; I studied day and night; I exerted myself to do more than I was perhaps fit for. I was determined to pass my examinations so well that I should be sure not only of admittance into the École, but of a free education there, for I wanted to spare you the expense, and I succeeded!

'It makes me shudder now to think of that appalling conscription of brains yearly made over to the Government by family ambition; a conscription which demands

such severe study at a time when a lad is almost a man, and growing fast in every way, cannot but do incalculable mischief; many precious faculties which later would have developed and grown strong and powerful, are extinguished by the light of the student's lamp. Nature's laws are inexorable; they are not to be thrust aside by the schemes nor at the pleasure of society; and the laws of the physical world, the laws which govern the nature without, hold good no less of human nature—every abuse must be paid for. If you must have fruit out of season, you have it from a forcing house either at the expense of the tree or of the quality of the fruit. La Quintinie killed the orange-trees that Louis XIV. might have a bouquet of orange blossoms every morning throughout the year. Any heavy demand made on a still growing intellect is a draft on its future.

'The pressing and special need of our age is the spirit of the lawgiver. Europe has so far seen no lawgiver since Jesus Christ; and Christ, who gave us no vestige of a political code, left His work incomplete. For example, before technical schools were established, and the present means of filling them with scholars was adopted, did they call in one of the great thinkers who hold in their heads the immensity of the sum of the relations of the institution to human brain-power; who can balance the advantages and disadvantages, and study in the past the laws of the future? Was any inquiry made into the after-lives of men who, for their misfortune, knew the circle of the sciences at too early an age? Was any estimate of their rarity attempted! Was their fate ascertained? Was it discovered how they contrived to endure the continual strain of thought? How many of them died like Pascal, prematurely, worn out by science? Some, again, lived to old age; when did these begin their studies? Was it known then, is it known now as I write, what conformation of the brain is best fitted to stand the strain, and to cope prematurely with know-

ledge? Is it so much as suspected that this is before all things a physiological question?

'Well, I think myself that the general rule is that the vegetative period of adolescence should be prolonged. There are exceptions; there are some so constituted that they are capable of this effort in youth, but the result is the shortening of life in most cases. Clearly the man of genius who can stand the precocious exercise of his faculties is bound to be an exception among exceptions. If medical testimony and social data bear me out, our way of recruiting for the technical schools in France works as much havoc among the best human specimens of each generation as La Quintinie's process among the orange-trees.

'But to continue (for I will append my doubts to each series of facts), I began my work anew at the Ecole, and with more enthusiasm than ever. I meant to leave it as successfully as I had entered it. Between the ages of nineteen and one-and-twenty I worked with all my might, and developed my faculties by their constant exercise. Those two years set the crown on the three which came before them, when I was only preparing to do great things. And then, what pride did I not feel when I had won the privilege of choosing the career most to my mind? I might be a military or marine engineer, might go on the staff of the Artillery, into the Mines department, or the Roads and Bridges. I took your advice, and became a civil engineer.

'Yet where I triumphed, how many fell out of the ranks! You know that from year to year the Government raises the standard of the École. The work grows harder and more trying from time to time. The course of preparatory study through which I went was nothing compared with the work at fever-heat in the École, to the end that every physical science — mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry, and the terminologies of each —may be packed into the heads of so many young men

between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one. The Government here in France, which in so many ways seems to aim at taking the place of the paternal authority, has in this respect no bowels—no father's pity for its children; it makes its experiments *in anima vili*. The ugly statistics of the mischief it has wrought have never been asked for; no one has troubled to inquire how many cases of brain fever there have been during the last thirty-six years; how many explosions of despair among those young lads; no one takes account of the moral destruction which decimates the victims. I lay stress on this painful aspect of the problem, because it occurs by the way, and before the final result; for a few weaklings the result comes soon instead of late. You know, besides, that these victims, whose minds work slowly, or who, it may be, are temporarily stupefied with overwork, are allowed to stay for three years instead of two at the Ecole, but the way these are regarded there has no very favourable influence on their capacity. In fact, it may chance that young men, who at a later day will show that they have something in them, may leave the École without an appointment at all, because at the final examination they do not exhibit the amount of knowledge required of them. These are "plucked," as they say, and Napoleon used to make sub-lieutenants of them. In these days the "plucked" candidate represents a vast loss of capital invested by families, and a loss of time for the lad himself.

'But, after all, I myself succeeded! At the age of one-and-twenty I had gone over all the ground discovered in mathematics by men of genius, and I was impatient to distinguish myself by going further. The desire is so natural that almost every student when he leaves the École fixes his eyes on the sun called glory in an invisible heaven. The first thought in all our minds was to be a Newton, a Laplace, or a Vauban. Such are the efforts which France requires

of young men who leave the famous École polytechnique!

'And now let us see what becomes of the men sorted and sifted with such care out of a whole generation. At one-and-twenty we dream dreams, a whole lifetime lies before us, we expect wonders. I entered the School of Roads and Bridges, and became a civil engineer. I studied construction, and with what enthusiasm! You must remember it. In 1826, when I left the School, at the age of twenty-four, I was still only a civil engineer on my promotion, with a Government grant of a hundred and fifty francs a month. The worst paid book-keeper in Paris will earn as much by the time he is eighteen, and with four hours' work in the day. By unhoped-for good luck, it may be because my studies had brought me distinction, I received an appointment as a surveyor in 1828. I was twenty-six years old. They sent me, you know where, into a sub-prefecture with a salary of two thousand five hundred francs. The money matters nothing. My lot is at any rate more brilliant than a carpenter's son has a right to expect; but what journeyman grocer put into a shop at the age of sixteen will not be fairly on the way to an independence by the time he is six-and-twenty?

'Then I found out the end to which these terrible displays of intelligence were directed, and why the gigantic efforts, required of us by the Government, were made. The Government set me to count paving stones and measure the heaps of road-metal by the waysides. I must repair, keep in order, and occasionally construct runnels and culverts, maintain the ways, clean out, and occasionally open ditches. At the office I must answer all questions relating to the alignment or the planting and felling of trees. These, are in fact, the principal and often the only occupations of an ordinary surveyor. Perhaps from time to time there is some bit of levelling to be done, and that we are obliged to do ourselves,

though any of the foremen with his practical experience could do the work a good deal better than we can with all our science.

'There are nearly four hundred of us altogether—ordinary surveyors and assistants—and as there are only some hundred odd engineers-in-chief, all the subordinates cannot hope for promotion; there is practically no higher rank to absorb the engineers-in-chief, for twelve or fifteen inspectors-general or divisionaries scarcely count, and their posts are almost as much of sinecures in our corps as colonelcies in the artillery when the battery is united with it. An ordinary civil engineer, like a captain of artillery, knows all that is known about his work; he ought not to need any one to look after him except an administrative head to connect the eighty-six engineers with each other and the Government, for a single engineer with two assistants is quite enough for a department. A hierarchy in such a body as ours works in this way. Energetic minds are subordinated to old effete intelligences, who think themselves bound to distort and alter (they think for the better) the drafts submitted to them; perhaps they do this simply to give some reason for their existence; and this, it seems to me, is the only influence exerted on public works in France by the General Council of Roads and Bridges.

'Let us suppose, however, that between the ages of thirty and forty I become an engineer of the first-class, and am an engineer-in-chief by the time I am fifty. Alas! I foresee my future; it lies before my eyes. My engineer-in-chief is a man of sixty. He left the famous École with distinction, as I did; he has grown grey in two departments over such work as I am doing; he has become the most commonplace man imaginable, has fallen from the heights of attainment he once reached; nay, more than that, he is not even abreast of science. Science has made progress, and he has remained stationary;

worse still, has forgotten what he once knew! The man who came to the front at the age of twenty-two with every sign of real ability has nothing of it left now but the appearance. At the very outset of his career his education was especially directed to mathematics and the exact sciences, and he took no interest in anything that was not "in his line." You would scarcely believe it, but the man knows absolutely nothing of other branches of learning. Mathematics have dried up his heart and brain. I cannot tell any one but you what a nullity he really is, screened by the name of the École polytechnique. The label is impressive; and people, being prejudiced in his favour, do not dare to throw any doubt on his ability. But to you I may say that his befogged intellects have cost the department in one affair a million francs, where two hundred thousand should have been ample. I was for protesting, for opening the prefect's eyes, and what not; but a friend of mine, another surveyor, told me about a man in the corps who became a kind of black sheep in the eyes of administration by doing something of this sort. "Would you yourself be very much pleased, when you are engineer-in-chief, to have your mistakes shown up by a subordinate?" asked he. "Your engineer-in-chief will be a divisionary inspector before very long. As soon as one of us makes some egregious blunder, the Administration (which, of course, must never be in the wrong) withdraws the perpetrator from active service and makes him an inspector." That is how the reward due to a capable man becomes a sort of premium on stupidity.

'All France saw one disaster in the heart of Paris, the miserable collapse of the first suspension bridge which an engineer (a member of the Académie des Sciences moreover) endeavoured to construct, a collapse caused by blunders which would not have been made by the constructor of the Canal de Briare in the time of Henri IV., nor by the monk who built the Pont Royal. Him too

the Administration consoled by a summons to the Board of the General Council.

'Are the technical schools really manufactories of incompetence? The problem requires prolonged observation. If there is anything in what I say, a reform is needed, at any rate in the way in which they are carried on, for I do not venture to question the usefulness of the Ecoles. Still, looking back over the past, does it appear that France has ever lacked men of great ability at need, or the talent she tries to hatch as required in these days by Monge's method? What school turned out Vauban save the great school called "vocation"? Who was Riquet's master? When genius has raised itself above the social level, urged upwards by a vocation, it is almost always fully equipped; and in that case your man is no "specialist," but has something universal in his gift. I do not believe that any engineer who ever left the École could build one of the miracles of architecture which Leonardo da Vinci reared; Leonardo at once mechanician, architect, and painter, one of the inventors of hydraulic science, the indefatigable constructor of canals. They are so accustomed while yet in their teens to the bald simplicity of geometry, that by the time they leave the École they have quite lost all feeling for grace or ornament; a column to their eyes is a useless waste of material; they return to the point where art begins—on utility they take their stand, and stay there.

'But this is as nothing compared with the disease which is consuming me. I feel that a most terrible change is being wrought in me; I feel that my energy and faculties, after the exorbitant strain put upon them, are dwindling and growing feeble. The influence of my humdrum life is creeping over me. After such efforts as mine, I feel that I am destined to do great things, and I am confronted by the most trivial task work, such as verifying yards of road metal, inspecting

highways, checking inventories of stores. I have not enough to do to fill two hours in the day.

'I watch my colleagues marry and fall out of touch with modern thought. Is my ambition really immoderate? I should like to serve my country. My country required me to give proof of no ordinary powers, and bade me become an encyclopedia of the sciences—and here I am, folding my arms in an obscure corner of a province. I am not allowed to leave the place where I am penned up, to exercise my wits by trying new and useful experiments elsewhere. A vague indefinable grudge is the certain reward awaiting any one of us who follows his own inspirations, and does more than the department requires of him. The most that such a man ought to hope for is that his overweening presumption may be passed over, his talent neglected, while his project receives decent burial in the pigeon-holes at headquarters. What will Vicat's reward be, I wonder? (Between ourselves, Vicat is the only man among us who has made any real advance in the science of construction.)

'The General Council of Roads and Bridges is partly made up of men worn out by long and sometimes honourable service, but whose remaining brain power only exerts itself negatively; these gentlemen erase anything that they cannot understand at their age, and act as a sort of extinguisher to be put when required on audacious innovations. The Council might have been created for the express purpose of paralysing the arm of the generous younger generation, which only asks for leave to work, and would fain serve France.

'Monstrous things happen in Paris. The future of a province depends on the *visa* of these bureaucrats. I have not time to tell you all about the intrigues which balk the best schemes; for them the best schemes are, as a matter of fact, those which open up the best prospects of money-making to the greed of speculators and companies, which knock most abuses on the head, for

abuses are always stronger than the spirit of improvement in France. In five years' time my old self-will no longer exists. I shall see my ambitions die out in me, and my noble desire to use the faculties which my country bade me display, and then left to rust in my obscure corner.

'Taking the most favourable view possible, my outlook seems to me to be very poor. I took advantage of leave of absence to come to Paris. I want to change my career, to find scope for my energies, knowledge, and activity. I shall send in my resignation, and go to some country where men with my special training are needed, where great things may be done. If none of all this is possible, I will throw in my lot with some of these new doctrines which seem as if they must make some great change in the present order of things, by directing the workers to better purpose. For what are we but labourers without work, tools lying idle in the warehouse? We are organised as if it was a question of shaking the globe, and we are required to do—nothing.

'I am conscious that there is something great in me which is pining away and will perish; I tell you this with mathematical explicitness. But I should like to have your advice before I make a change in my condition. I look on myself as your son, and should never take any important step without consulting you, for your experience is as great as your goodness. I know, of course, that when the Government has obtained its specially trained men, it can no more set its engineers to construct public monuments than it can declare war to give the army an opportunity of winning great battles and of finding out which are its great captains. But, then, as the man has never failed to appear when circumstances called for him; as, at the moment when there is much money to be spent and great things to be done, one of these unique men of genius springs up from the crowd; and as, particularly in matters of this kind, one Vauban is enough at a time, nothing could better demonstrate the

utter uselessness of the institution. In conclusion, when a picked man's mental energies have been stimulated by all this preparation, how can the Government help seeing that he will make any amount of struggle before he allows himself to be effaced? Is it wise policy? What is it but a way of kindling burning ambition? Would they bid all those perfervid heads learn to calculate anything and everything but the probabilities of their own futures?

'There are, no doubt, exceptions among some six hundred young men, some firm and unbending characters, who decline to be withdrawn in this way from circulation. I know some of them; but if the story of their struggles with men and things could be told in full; if it were known how that, while full of useful projects and ideas which would put life and wealth into stagnant country districts, they meet with hindrances put in their way by the very men who (so the Government led them to believe) would give them help and countenance, the strong man, the man of talent, the man whose nature is a miracle, would be thought a hundred times more unfortunate and more to be pitied than the man whose degenerate nature tamely resigns himself to the atrophy of his faculties.

'So I would prefer to direct some private commercial or industrial enterprise, and live on very little, while trying to find a solution of some one of the many unsolved problems of industry and modern life, rather than remain where I am. You will say that there is nothing to prevent me from employing my powers as it is; that in the silence of this humdrum life I might set myself to find the solution of one of those problems which presses on humanity. Ah! monsieur, do you not understand what the influence of the provinces is; the enervating effect of a life just sufficiently busy to fill the days with all but futile work, but yet not full enough to give occupation to the powers so fully developed by such a training as ours? You will not think, my dear guardian, that I am eaten up with the ambition of money-making, or consumed with a mad

desire for fame. I have not learned to calculate to so little purpose that I cannot measure the emptiness of fame. The inevitable activity of the life has led me not to think of marriage; and looking at my present prospects, I have not so good an opinion of existence as to give such a sorry present to another self. Although I look upon money as one of the most powerful instruments that can be put in the hands of a civilised man, money is, after all, only a means. My sole pleasure lies in the assurance that I am serving my country. To have employment for my faculties in a congenial atmosphere would be the height of enjoyment for me. Perhaps among your acquaintance in your part of the world, in the circle on which you shine, you might hear of something which requires some of the aptitude which you know that I possess; I will wait six months for an answer from you.

'These things which I am writing to you, dear patron and friend, others are thinking. I have seen a good many of my colleagues or old scholars at the École, caught, as I was, in the snare of a special training; ordnance surveyors, captain-professors, captains in the Artillery, doomed (as they see) to be captains for the rest of their days, bitterly regretting that they did not go into the regular army. Again and again, in fact, we have admitted to each other in confidence that we are victims of a long mystification, which we only discover when it is too late to draw back, when the mill-horse is used to the round, and the sick man accustomed to his disease.

'After looking carefully into these melancholy results, I have asked myself the following questions, which I send to you, as a man of sense, whose mature wisdom will see all that lies in them, knowing that they are fruit of thought refined by the fires of painful experience.

'What end has the Government in view? To obtain the best abilities? If so, the Government sets to work to obtain a directly opposite result: if it had hated talent,

it could not have had better success in producing respectable mediocrities.—Or does it intend to open out a career to selected intelligence? It could not well have given it a more mediocre position. There is not a man sent out by the Écoles who does not regret between fifty and sixty that he fell into the snare concealed by the offers of the Government.—Does it mean to secure men of genius? What really great man have the Écoles turned out since 1790? Would Cachin, the genius to whom we owe Cherbourg, have existed but for Napoleon? It was Imperial despotism which singled him out; the Constitutional Administration would have stifled him.—Does the Académie des Sciences number many members who have passed through the technical schools? Two or three, it may be; but the man of genius invariably appears from outside. In the particular sciences which are studied at these schools, genius obeys no laws but its own; it only develops under circumstances over which we have no control; and neither the Government, nor anthropology, knows the conditions. Riquet, Perronet, Leonardo da Vinci, Cachin, Palladio, Brunelleschi, Michel Angelo, Bramante, Vauban, and Vicat all derived their genius from unobserved causes and preparation to which we give the name of chance—the great word for fools to fall back upon. Schools or no schools, these sublime workers have never been lacking in every age. And now, does the Government, by means of organising, obtain works of public utility better done or at a cheaper rate?

'In the first place, private enterprise does very well without professional engineers; and, in the second, State-directed works are the most expensive of all; and besides the actual outlay, there is the cost of the maintenance of the great staff of the Roads and Bridges Department. Finally, in other countries where they have no institutions of this kind, in Germany, England, and Italy, such public works are carried out quite as well, and cost less than ours in France. Each of the three

countries is well known for new and useful inventions of this kind. I know it is the fashion to speak of our Écoles as if they were the envy of Europe; but Europe has been watching us these fifteen years, and nowhere will you find the like instituted elsewhere. The English, those shrewd men of business, have better schools among their working classes, where they train practical men, who become conspicuous at once when they rise from practical work to theory. Stephenson and Macadam were not pupils in these famous institutions of ours.

'But where is the use? When young and clever engineers, men of spirit and enthusiasm, have solved at the outset of their career the problem of the maintenance of the roads of France, which requires hundreds of millions of francs every twenty-five years, which roads are in a deplorable state, it is in vain for them to publish learned treatises and memorials; everything is swallowed down by the board of direction, everything goes in and nothing comes out of a central bureau in Paris, where the old men are jealous of their juniors, and high places are refuges for superannuated blunderers.

'This is how, with a body of educated men distributed all over France, a body which is part of the machinery of administrative government, and to whom the country looks for direction and enlightenment on the great questions within their department, it will probably happen that we in France shall still be talking about railways when other countries have finished theirs. Now, if ever France ought to demonstrate the excellence of her technical schools as an institution, should it not be in a magnificent public work of this special kind, destined to change the face of many countries, and to double the length of human life by modifying the laws of time and space? Belgium, the United States, Germany, and England, without an École polytechnique, will have a network of railways while our engineers are still tracing out the plans, and hideous jobbery lurking behind the

projects will check their execution. You cannot lay a stone in France until half a score of scribblers in Paris have drawn up a drivelling report that nobody wants. The Government, therefore, gets no good of its technical schools; and as for the individual—he is tied down to a mediocre career, his life is a cruel delusion. Certain it is that with the abilities which he displayed between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five he would have gained more reputation and riches if he had been left to shift for himself than he will acquire in the career to which Government condemns him. As a merchant, a scientific man, or a soldier, this picked man would have a wide field before him, his precious faculties and enthusiasm would not have been prematurely and stupidly exhausted. Then where is the advance? Assuredly the individual and the State both lose by the present system. Does not an experiment carried on for half a century show that changes are needed in the way the institution is worked? What priesthood qualifies a man for the task of selecting from a whole generation those who shall hereafter be the learned class of France? What studies should not these high priests of Destiny have made? A knowledge of mathematics is, perhaps, scarcely so necessary as physiological knowledge; and does it not seem to you that something of that clairvoyance which is the wizardry of great men might be required too? As a matter of fact, the examiners are old professors, men worthy of all honour, grown old in harness; their duty it is to discover the best memories, and there is an end of it; they can do nothing but what is required of them. Truly their functions should be the most important ones in the State, and call for extraordinary men to fulfil them.

'Do not think, my dear friend and patron, that my censure is confined to the École through which I myself passed; it applies not only to the institution itself, but also and still more to the methods by which lads are

admitted; that is to say, to the system of competitive examination. Competition is a modern invention, and essentially bad. It is bad not only in learning but in every possible connection, in the arts, in every election made of men, projects, or things. It is unfortunate that our famous schools should not have turned out better men than any other chance assemblage of lads; but it is still more disgraceful that among the prizemen at the Institute there has been no great painter, musician, architect, or sculptor; even as for the past twenty years the general elections have swept no single great statesman to the front out of all the shoals of mediocrities. My remarks have a bearing upon an error which is vitiating both politics and education in France. This cruel error is based on the following principle, which organisers have overlooked:—

'"*Nothing in experience or in the nature of things can warrant the assumption that the intellectual qualities of early manhood will be those of maturity.*"

'At the present time I have been brought in contact with several distinguished men who are studying the many moral maladies which prey upon France. They recognise, as I do, the fact that secondary education forces a sort of temporary capacity in those who have neither present work nor future prospects; and that the enlightenment diffused by primary education is of no advantage to the State, because it is bereft of belief and sentiment.

'Our whole educational system calls for sweeping reform, which should be carried out under the direction of a man of profound knowledge, a man with a strong will, gifted with that legislative faculty which, possibly, is found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau alone of all moderns.

'Then, perhaps, the superfluous specialists might find employment in elementary teaching; it is badly needed by the mass of the people. We have not enough patient and devoted teachers for the training of these classes.

The deplorable prevalence of crimes and misdemeanours points to a weak spot in our social system—the one-sided education which tends to weaken the fabric of society, by teaching the masses to think sufficiently to reject the religious beliefs necessary for their government, yet not enough to raise them to a conception of the theory of obedience and duty, which is the last word of transcendental philosophy. It is impossible to put a whole nation through a course of Kant; and belief and use and wont are more wholesome for the people than study and argument.

'If I had to begin again from the very beginning, I dare say I might enter a seminary and incline to the life of a simple country parson or a village schoolmaster. But now I have gone too far to be a mere elementary teacher; and, besides, a wider field of action is open to me than the schoolhouse or the parish. I cannot go the whole way with the Saint-Simonians, with whom I am tempted to throw in my lot; but with all their mistakes, they have laid a finger on many weak points in our social system, the results of our legislation, which will be palliated rather than remedied—simply putting off the evil day for France.—Good-bye, dear sir; in spite of these observations of mine, rest assured of my respectful and faithful friendship, a friendship which can only grow with time.

'Grégoire Gérard.'

Acting on old business habit, Grossetête had indorsed the letter with the rough draft of a reply, and written beneath it the sacramental word 'Answered.'

'My dear Gérard,—It is the more unnecessary to enter upon any discussion of the observations contained in your letter, since that chance (to make use of the word for fools) enables me to make you an offer which will practically extricate you from a position in which

you find yourself so ill at ease. Mme. Graslin, who owns the Forest of Montégnac, and a good deal of barren land below the long range of hills on which the forest lies, has a notion of turning her vast estates to some account, of exploiting the woods and bringing the stony land into cultivation. Small pay and plenty of work! A great result to be brought about by insignificant means, a district to be transformed! Abundance made to spring up on the barest rock! Is not this what you wished to do, you who would fain realise a poet's dream? From the sincere ring of your letter, I do not hesitate to ask you to come to Limoges to see me; but do not send in your resignation, my friend, only sever your connection with your corps, explain to the authorities that you are about to make a study of some problems that lie within your province, but outside the limits of your work for the Government. In that way you will lose none of your privileges, and you will gain time in which to decide whether this scheme of the curé's at Montégnac, which finds favour in Mme. Graslin's eyes, is a feasible one. If these vast changes should prove to be practicable, I will lay the possible advantages before you by word of mouth, and not by letter.—Believe me to be, always sincerely, your friend,

'GROSSETÊTE.'

For all reply Mme. Graslin wrote:—

'Thank you, my friend; I am waiting to see your protégé.'

She showed the letter to M. Bonnet with the remark, 'Here is one more wounded creature seeking the great hospital!'

The curé read the letter and re-read it, took two or three turns upon the terrace, and handed the paper back to Mme. Graslin.

'It comes from a noble nature, the man has something

in him, he said. 'He writes that the schools, invented by the spirit of the Revolution, manufacture ineptitude; for my own part, I call them manufactories of unbelief; for if M. Gérard is not an atheist, he is a Protestant——'

'We will ask him,' she said, struck with the curé's answer.

A fortnight later, in the month of December, M. Grossetête came to Montégnac, in spite of the cold, to introduce his protégé. Véronique and M. Bonnet awaited his arrival with impatience.

'One must love you very much, my child,' said the old man, taking both of Véronique's hands, and kissing them with the old-fashioned elderly gallantry which a woman never takes amiss; 'yes, one must love you very much indeed to stir out of Limoges in such weather as this; but I had made up my mind that I must come in person to make you a present of M. Grégoire Gérard. Here he is.—A man after your own heart, M. Bonnet,' the old banker added with an affectionate greeting to the curé.

Gerard's appearance was not very prepossessing. He was a thick-set man of middle height; his neck was lost in his shoulders, to use the common expression; he had the golden hair and red eyes of an Albino; and his eyelashes and eyebrows were almost white. Although, as often happens in these cases, his complexion was dazzlingly fair, its original beauty was destroyed by the very apparent pits and seams left by an attack of small-pox; much reading had doubtless injured his eyesight, for he wore coloured spectacles. Nor when he divested himself of a thick overcoat, like a gendarme's, did his dress redeem these personal defects.

The way in which his clothes were put on and buttoned, like his untidy cravat and crumpled shirt, were distinctive signs of that personal carelessness, laid to the charge of learned men, who are all, more or less,

oblivious of their surroundings. His face and bearing, the great development of chest and shoulders, as compared with his thin legs, suggested a sort of physical deterioration produced by meditative habits, not uncommon in those who think much; but the stout heart and eager intelligence of the writer of the letter were plainly visible on a forehead which might have been chiselled in Carrara marble. Nature seemed to have reserved her seal of greatness for the brow, and stamped it with the steadfastness and goodness of the man. The nose was of the true Gallic type, and blunted. The firm, straight lines of the mouth indicated an absolute discretion and the sense of economy; but the whole face looked old before its time, and worn with study.

Mme. Graslin turned to speak to the inventor. 'We already owe you thanks, monsieur,' she said, 'for being so good as to come to superintend engineering work in a country which can hold out no inducements to you save the satisfaction of knowing that you can do good.'

'M. Grossetête told me enough about you on our way here, madame,' he answered, 'to make me feel very glad to be of any use to you. The prospect of living near to you and M. Bonnet seemed to me charming. Unless I am driven away, I look to spend my life here.'

'We will try to give you no cause for changing your opinion,' smiled Mme. Graslin.

Grossetête took her aside. 'Here are the papers which the public prosecutor gave me,' he said. 'He seemed very much surprised that you did not apply directly to him. All that you have asked has been done promptly and with goodwill. In the first place, your protégé will be reinstated in all his rights as a citizen; and in the second, Catherine Curieux will be sent to you in three months' time.

'Where is she?' asked Véronique.

'At the Hôpital Saint-Louis,' Grossetête answered. 'She cannot leave Paris until she is recovered.'

'Ah! is she ill, poor thing?'

'You will find all that you want to know here,' said Grossetête, holding out a packet.

Véronique went back to her guests, and led the way to the magnificent dining-hall on the ground floor, walking between Grossetête and Gérard. She presided over the dinner without joining them, for she had made it a rule to take her meals alone since she had come to Montégnac. No one but Aline was in the secret, which the girl kept scrupulously until her mistress was in danger of her life.

The mayor of Montégnac, the justice of the peace, and the doctor had naturally been invited to meet the new-comer.

The doctor, a young man of seven-and-twenty, Roubaud by name, was keenly desirous of making the acquaintance of the great lady of Limousin. The curé was the better pleased to introduce him at the château since it was M. Bonnet's wish that Véronique should gather some sort of society about her, to distract her thoughts from herself, and to find some mental food. Roubaud was one of the young doctors perfectly equipped in his science, such as the École de médecine turns out in Paris, a man who might, without doubt, have looked to a brilliant future in the vast theatre of the capital; but he had seen something of the strife of ambitions there, and took fright, conscious that he had more knowledge than capacity for scheming, more aptitude than greed; his gentle nature had inclined him to the narrower theatre of provincial life, where he hoped to win appreciation sooner than in Paris.

At Limoges Roubaud had come into collision with old-fashioned ways and patients not to be shaken in their prejudices; he had been won over by M. Bonnet, who at sight of the kindly and prepossessing face had thought that here was a worker to co-operate with him. Roubaud was short and fair-haired, and would have been rather

uninteresting looking but for the grey eyes, which revealed the physiologist's sagacity and the perseverance of the student. Hitherto Montégnac was fain to be content with an old army surgeon, who found his cellars a good deal more interesting than his patients, and who, moreover, was past the hard work of a country doctor. He happened to die just at that time. Roubaud had been in Montégnac for some eighteen months, and was very popular there; but Desplein's young disciple, one of the followers of Cabanis, was no Catholic in his beliefs. In fact, as to religion, he had lapsed into a fatal indifference, from which he was not to be roused. He was the despair of the curé, not that there was any harm whatever in him, his invariable absence from church was excused by his profession, he never talked on religious topics, he was incapable of making proselytes, no good Catholic could have behaved better than he, but he declined to occupy himself with a problem which, to his thinking, was beyond the scope of the human mind; and the curé once hearing him let fall the remark that Pantheism was the religion of all great thinkers, fancied that Roubaud inclined to the Pythagorean doctrine of the transformation of souls.

Roubaud, meeting Mme. Graslin for the first time, felt violently startled at the sight of her. His medical knowledge enabled him to divine in her face and bearing and worn features unheard-of suffering of mind and body, a preternatural strength of character, and the great faculties which can endure the strain of very different vicissitudes. He, in a manner, read her inner history, even the dark places deliberately hidden away; and more than this, he saw the disease that preyed upon the secret heart of this fair woman; for there are certain tints in human faces that indicate a poison working in the thoughts, even as the colour of fruit will betray the presence of the worm at its core. From that time forward M. Roubaud felt so strongly attracted to Mme.

Graslin, that he feared to be drawn beyond the limit where friendship ends. There was an eloquence, which men always understand, in Véronique's brows and attitude, and, above all, in her eyes; it was sufficiently unmistakable that she was dead to love, even as other women with a like eloquence proclaim the contrary. The doctor became her chivalrous worshipper on the spot. He exchanged a swift glance with the curé, and M. Bonnet said within himself—

'Here is the flash from heaven that will change this poor unbeliever? Mme. Graslin will have more eloquence than I.'

The mayor, an old countryman, overawed by the splendour of the dining-room, and surprised to be asked to meet one of the richest men in the department, had put on his best clothes for the occasion; he felt somewhat uneasy in them, and scarcely more at ease with his company. Mme. Graslin, too, in her mourning dress was an awe-inspiring figure; the worthy mayor was dumb. He had once been a farmer at Saint-Léonard, had bought the one habitable house in the township, and cultivated the land that belonged to it himself. He could read and write, but only managed to acquit himself in his official capacity with the help of the justice's clerk, who prepared his work for him; so he ardently desired the advent of a notary, meaning to lay the burden of his public duties on official shoulders when that day should come; but Montégnac was so poverty-stricken, that a resident notary was hardly needed, and the notaries of the principal place in the arrondissement found clients in Montégnac.

The justice of the peace, Clousier by name, was a retired barrister from Limoges. Briefs had grown scarce with the learned gentleman, owing to a tendency on his part to put in practice the noble maxim that a barrister is the first judge of the client and the case. About the year 1809 he obtained this appointment; the salary was

a meagre pittance, but enough to live upon. In this way he had reached the most honourable but the most complete penury. Twenty-two years of residence in the poor commune had transformed the worthy lawyer into a countryman, scarcely to be distinguished from any of the small farmers round about, whom he resembled even in the cut of his coat. But beneath Clousier's homely exterior dwelt a clairvoyant spirit, a philosophical politician whose Gallio's attitude was due to his perfect knowledge of human nature and of men's motives. For a long time he had baffled M. Bonnet's perspicacity. The man who, in a higher sphere, might have played the active part of a L'Hôpital, incapable of intrigue, like all deep thinkers, had come at last to lead the contemplative life of a hermit of olden time. Rich without doubt, with all the gains of privation, he was swayed by no personal considerations; he knew the law and judged impartially. His life, reduced to the barest necessaries, was regular and pure. The peasants loved and respected M. Clousier for the fatherly disinterestedness with which he settled their disputes and gave advice in their smallest difficulties. For the last two years 'Old Clousier,' as every one called him in Montégnac, had had one of his nephews to help him, a rather intelligent young man, who, at a later day, contributed not a little to the prosperity of the commune.

The most striking thing about the old man's face was the broad vast forehead. Two bushy masses of white hair stood out on either side of it. A florid complexion and magisterial portliness might give the impression that (in spite of his real sobriety) he was as earnest a disciple of Bacchus as of Troplong and Toullier. His scarcely audible voice indicated asthmatic oppression of breathing; possibly the dry air of Montégnac had counted for something in his decision when he made up his mind to accept the post. His little house had been fitted up for him by the well-to-do sabot maker, his landlord. Clousier

had already seen Véronique at church, and had formed his own opinion of her, which opinion he kept to himself; he had not even spoken of her to M. Bonnet, with whom he was beginning to feel at home. For the first time in his life, the justice of the peace found himself in the company of persons able to understand him.

When the six guests had taken their places round a handsomely-appointed table (for Véronique had brought all her furniture with her to Montégnac), there was a brief embarrassed pause. The doctor, the mayor, and the justice were none of them acquainted with Grossetête or with Gérard. But during the first course the banker's geniality thawed the ice, Mme. Graslin graciously encouraged M. Roubaud and drew out Gérard; under her influence all these different natures, full of exquisite qualities, recognised their kinship. It was not long before each felt himself to be in a congenial atmosphere. So by the time dessert was put on the table, and the crystal and the gilded edges of the porcelain sparkled, when choice wines were set in circulation, handed to the guests by Aline, Maurice Champion, and Grossetête's man, the conversation had become more confidential, so that the four noble natures thus brought together by chance felt free to speak their real minds on the great subjects that men love to discuss in good faith.

'Your leave of absence coincided with the Revolution of July,' Grossetête said, looking at Gérard in a way that asked his opinion.

'Yes,' answered the engineer. 'I was in Paris during the three famous days; I saw it all; I drew some disheartening conclusions.'

'What were they?' M. Bonnet asked quickly.

'There is no patriotism left except under the workman's shirt,' answered Gérard. 'Therein lies the ruin of France. The Revolution of July is the defeat of men who are notable for birth, fortune, and talent, and a defeat in which they acquiesce. The enthusiastic zeal of the

masses has gained a victory over the rich and intelligent classes, to whom zeal and enthusiasm is antipathetic.'

'To judge by last year's events,' added M. Clousier, the change is a direct encouragement to the evil which is devouring us—to Individualism. In fifty years' time every generous question will be replaced by a "*What is that to me?*" the watchword of independent opinion descended from the spiritual heights where Luther, Calvin, Zwingle, and Knox inaugurated it, till even in political economy each has a right to his own opinion. *Each for himself! Let each man mind his own business!* —these two terrible phrases, together with *What is that to me?* complete a trinity of doctrine for the bourgeoisie and the peasant proprietors. This egoism is the result of defects in our civil legislation, somewhat too hastily accomplished in the first instance, and now confirmed by the terrible consecration of the Revolution of July.'

The justice relapsed into his wonted silence again with this speech, which gave the guests plenty to think over. Then M. Bonnet ventured yet further, encouraged by Clousier's remarks, and by a glance exchanged between Gérard and Grossetête.

'Good King Charles x.,' said he, 'has just failed in the most provident and salutary enterprise that king ever undertook for the happiness of a nation intrusted to him. The Church should be proud of the share she had in his councils. But it was the heart and brain of the upper classes which failed him, as they had failed before over the great question of the law with regard to the succession of the eldest son, the eternal honour of the one bold statesman of the Restoration—the Comte de Peyronnet. To reconstruct the nation on the basis of the family, to deprive the press of its power to do harm without restricting its usefulness, to confine the elective chamber to the functions for which it was really intended, to give back to religion its influence over the people,—such were

the four cardinal points of the domestic policy of the House of Bourbon. Well, in twenty years' time all France will see the necessity of that great and salutary course. King Charles x. was, moreover, more insecure in the position which he decided to quit than in the position in which his paternal authority came to an end. The future history of our fair country, when everything shall be periodically called in question, when ceaseless discussion shall take the place of action, when the press shall become the sovereign power and the tool of the basest ambitions, will prove the wisdom of the king who has just taken with him the real principles of government. History will render to him his due for the courage with which he withstood his best friends, when once he had probed the wound, seen its extent, and the pressing necessity for the treatment, which has not been continued by those for whom he threw himself into the breach.'

'Well, M. le Curé, you go straight to the point without the slightest disguise,' cried M. Gérard, 'but I do not say nay. When Napoleon made his Russian campaign he was forty years ahead of his age; he was misunderstood. Russia and England, in 1830, can explain the campaign of 1812. Charles x. was in the same unfortunate position; twenty-five years hence his ordinances may perhaps become law.'

'France, too eloquent a country not to babble, too vainglorious to recognise real ability, in spite of the sublime good sense of her language and the mass of her people, is the very last country in which to introduce the system of two deliberating chambers,' the justice of the peace remarked. 'At any rate, not without the admirable safeguards gainst these elements in the national character, devised by Napoleon's experience. The representative system may work in a country like England, where its action is circumscribed by the nature of the soil; but the right of primogeniture, as applied to real estate, is a necessary

part of it; without this factor, the representative system becomes sheer nonsense. England owes its existence to the quasi-feudal law which transmitted the house and lands to the oldest son. Russia is firmly seated on the feudal system of autocracy. For these reasons, both nations at the present day are making alarming progress. Austria could not have resisted our invasions as she did, nor declared a second war against Napoleon, had it not been for the law of primogeniture, which preserves the strength of the family and maintains production on the large scale necessary to the State. The House of Bourbon, conscious that Liberalism had relegated France to the rank of a third-rate power in Europe, determined to regain and keep their place, and the country shook off the Bourbons when they had all but saved the country. I do not know how deep the present state of things will sink us.'

'If there should be a war,' cried Grossetête, 'France will be without horses, as Napoleon was in 1813, when he was reduced to the resources of France alone, and could not make use of the victories of Lutzen and Bautzen, and was crushed at Leipsic! If peace continues, the evil will grow worse: twenty years hence, the number of horned cattle and horses in France will be diminished by one-half.'

'M. Grossetête is right,' said Gérard.—'So the work which you have decided to attempt here is a service done to your country, madame,' he added, turning to Véronique.

'Yes,' said the justice of the peace, 'because Mme. Graslin has but one son. But will this chance in the succession repeat itself? For a certain time, let us hope, the great and magnificent scheme of cultivation which you are to carry into effect will be in the hands of one owner, and therefore will continue to provide grazing land for horses and cattle. But, in spite of all, a day will come when forest and field will be either divided up or sold in lots. Division and subdivision will follow,

until the six thousand acres of plain will count ten or twelve hundred owners; and when that time comes, there will be no more horses nor prize cattle.'

'Oh! when that time comes——' said the mayor.

'There is a *What is that to me?*' cried M. Grossetête, 'and M. Clousier sounded the signal for it; he is caught in the act.—But, monsieur,' the banker went on gravely, addressing the bewildered mayor, 'the time *has* come! Round about Paris for a ten-league radius, the land is divided up into little patches that will hardly pasture sufficient milch cows. The commune of Argenteuil numbers thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-five plots of land, a good many of them bringing in less than fifteen centimes a year! If it were not for high farming and manure from Paris, which gives heavy crops of fodder of different kinds, I do not know how cow-keepers and dairymen would manage. As it is, the animals are peculiarly subject to inflammatory diseases consequent on the heating diet and confinement to cow-sheds. They wear out their cows round about Paris just as they wear out horses in the streets. Then market-gardens, orchards, nurseries, and vineyards pay so much better than pasture, that the grazing land is gradually diminishing. A few years more, and milk will be sent in by express to Paris, like saltfish, and what is going on round Paris is happening also about all large towns. The evils of the minute subdivision of landed property are extending round a hundred French cities; some day all France will be eaten up by them.

'In 1800, according to Chaptal, there were about five million acres of vineyard; exact statistics would show fully five times as much to-day. When Normandy is split up into an infinitude of small holdings, by our system of inheritance fifty per cent. of the horse and cattle trade there will fall off; still Normandy will have the monopoly of the Paris milk trade, for luckily the climate will not permit vine culture. Another curious thing to

notice is the steady rise in the price of butcher meat. In 1814, prices ranged from seven to eleven sous per pound; in 1850, twenty years hence, Paris will pay twenty sous, unless some genius is raised up to carry out the theories of Charles X.'

'You have pointed out the greatest evil in France,' said the justice of the peace. 'The cause of it lies in the chapter *Des Successions* in the Civil Code, wherein the equal division of real estate among the children of the family is required. That is the pestle which is constantly grinding the country to powder, gives to every one but a life-interest in property which cannot remain as it is after his death. A continuous process of decomposition (for the reverse process is never set up) will end by ruining France. The French Revolution generated a deadly virus, and the Days of July have set the poison working afresh; this dangerous germ of disease is the acquisition of land by peasants. If the chapter *Des Successions* is the origin of the evil, it is through the peasant that it reaches its worst phase. The peasant never relinquishes the land he has won. Let a bit of land once get between the ogre's ever-hungry jaws, he divides and subdivides it till there are but strips of three furrows left. Nay, even there he does not stop! he will divide the three furrows in lengths. The commune of Argenteuil, which M. Grossetête instanced just now, is a case in point. The preposterous value which the peasants set on the smallest scraps of land makes it quite impossible to reconstruct an estate. The law and procedure are made a dead letter at once by this division, and ownership is reduced to absurdity. But it is a comparatively trifling matter that the minute subdivision of the law should paralyse the treasury and the law by making it impossible to carry out its wisest regulations. There are far greater evils than even these. There are actually landlords of property bringing in fifteen and twenty centimes per annum!

'Monsieur has just said something about the falling off

of cattle and horses,' Clousier continued, looking at Grossetête; 'the system of inheritance counts for much in that matter. The peasant proprietor keeps cows, and cows only, because milk enters into his diet; he sells the calves; he even sells butter. He has no mind to raise oxen, still less to breed horses; he has only just sufficient fodder for a year's consumption; and when a dry spring comes and hay is scarce, he is forced to take his cow to market; he cannot afford to keep her. If it should fall out so unluckily that two bad hay harvests came in succession, you would see some strange fluctuations in the price of beef in Paris, and, above all, in veal, when the third year came.'

'And how would they do for "patriotic banquets" then?' asked the doctor, smiling.

'Ah!' exclaimed Mme. Graslin, glancing at Roubaud, 'so even here, as everywhere else, politics must be served up with journalistic "items."'

'In this bad business the bourgeoisie play the part of American pioneers,' continued Clousier. 'They buy up the large estates, too large for the peasant to meddle with, and divide them. After the bulk has been cut up and triturated, a forced sale or an ordinary sale in lots hands it over sooner or later to the peasant. Everything nowadays is reduced to figures, and I know of none more eloquent than these:—France possesses forty-nine million *hectares* of land, for the sake of convenience, let us say forty, deducting something for roads and highroads, dunes, canals, land out of cultivation, and wastes like the plain of Montegnac, which need capital. Now, out of forty million *hectares* to a population of thirty-two millions, there are a hundred and twenty-five million parcels of land, according to the land-tax returns. I have not taken the fractions into account. So we have outrun the agrarian law, and yet neither poverty nor discord are at an end. Then the next thing will be that those who are turning the land into crumbs and diminish-

ing the output of produce, will find mouthpieces for the cry that true social justice only permits the usufruct of the land to each. They will say that ownership in perpetuity is robbery. The Saint-Simonians have begun already.'

'There spoke the magistrate,' said Grossetête, 'and this is what the banker adds to his bold reflections. When landed property became tenable by peasants and small shopkeepers, a great wrong was done to France, though the Government does not so much as suspect it. Suppose that we set down the whole mass of the peasants at three million families, after deducting the paupers. Those families all belong to the wage-earning class. Their wages are paid in money instead of in kind——'

'There is another immense blunder in our legislation,' Clousier cried, breaking in on the banker. 'In 1790 it might still have been possible to pass a law empowering employers to pay wages in kind, but now—to introduce such a measure would be to risk a Revolution.'

'In this way,' Grossetête continued, 'the money of the country passes into the pockets of the proletariat. Now, the peasant has one passion, one desire, one determination, one aim in life—to die a landed proprietor. This desire, as M. Clousier has very clearly shown, is one result of the Revolution—a direct consequence of the sale of the national lands. Only those who have no idea of the state of things in country districts could refuse to admit that each of those three million families annually buries fifty francs as a regular thing, and in this way a hundred and fifty millions of francs are withdrawn from circulation every year. The science of political economy has reduced to an axiom the statement that a five-franc piece, if it passes through a hundred hands in the course of a day, does duty for five hundred francs. Now, it is certain for some of us old observers of the state of things in country districts, that the peasant fixes his eyes on a bit of land, keeps ready to pounce upon it, and bides his time—meanwhile

he never invests his capital. The intervals in the peasant's land-purchases should, therefore, be reckoned at periods of seven years. For seven years, consequently, a capital of eleven hundred million francs is lying idle in the peasants' hands; and as the lower middle classes do the same thing to quite the same extent, and behave in the same way with regard to land on too large a scale for the peasant to nibble at, in forty-two years France loses the interest on two milliards of francs at least—that is to say, on something like a hundred millions every seven years, or six hundred millions in forty-two years. But this is not the only loss. France has failed to create the worth of six hundred millions in agricultural or industrial produce. And this failure to produce may be taken as a loss of twelve hundred million francs; for if the market price of a product were not double the actual cost of production, commerce would be at a standstill. The proletariat deprives itself of six hundred million francs of wages. These six hundred millions of initial loss that represent, for an economist, twelve hundred millions of loss of benefit derived from circulation, explain how it is that our commerce, shipping trade, and agriculture compare so badly with the state of things in England. In spite of the differences between the two countries (a good two-thirds of them, moreover, in our favour), England could mount our cavalry twice over, and every one there eats meat. But then, under the English system of land-tenure, it is almost impossible for the working classes to buy land, and so all the money is kept in constant circulation. So beside the evils of the comminution of the land, and the decay of the trade in cattle, horses, and sheep, the chapter *Des Successions* costs us a further loss of six hundred million francs of interest on the capital buried by the peasants and tradespeople, or twelve hundred million francs' worth of produce (at the least)—that is to say, a total loss of three milliards of francs withdrawn from circulation every half-century.'

'The moral effect is worse than the material effect!' cried the curé. 'We are turning the peasantry into pauper landowners, and half educating the lower middle classes. It will not be long before the canker of *Each for himself! Let each mind his own business!* which did its work last July among the upper classes, will spread to the middle classes. A proletariat of hardened materialists, knowing no God but envy, no zeal but the despair of hunger, with no faith nor belief left, will come to the front, and trample the heart of the country under foot. The foreigner, waxing great under a monarchical government, will find us under the shadow of royalty without the reality of a king, without law under the cover of legality, owners of property but not proprietors, with the right of election but without a government, listless holders of free and independent opinions, equal but equally unfortunate. Let us hope that between now and then God will raise up in France the man for the time, one of those elect who breathe a new spirit into a nation, a man who, whether he is a Sylla or a Marius, whether he comes from the heights or rises from the depths, will reconstruct society.'

'The first thing to do will be to send him to the Assizes or to the police court,' said Gérard. 'The judgment of Socrates or of Christ will be given to him, here in 1831, as of old in Attica and at Jerusalem. To-day, as of old, jealous mediocrity allows the thinker to starve. If the great political physicians who have studied the diseases of France, and are opposed to the spirit of the age, should resist to the starvation-point, we ridicule them, and treat them as visionaries. Here in France we revolt against the sovereign thinker, the great man of the future, just as we rise in revolt against the political sovereign.'

'But in those old times the Sophists had a very limited audience,' cried the justice of the peace; 'while to-day, through the medium of the periodical press, they

can lead a whole nation astray; and the press which pleads for common-sense finds no echo!'

The mayor looked at M. Clousier with intense astonishment. Mme. Graslin, delighted to find a simple justice of the peace interested in such grave problems, turned to her neighbour M. Roubaud with, 'Do you know M. Clousier?'

'Not till to-day! Madame, you are working miracles,' he added in her ear. 'And yet look at his forehead, how finely shaped it is! It is like the classical or traditional brow that sculptors gave to Lycurgus and the wise men of Greece, is it not?—Clearly there was an impolitic side to the Revolution of July,' he added aloud, after going through Grossetête reasonings. He had been a medical student, and perhaps would have lent a hand at a barricade.

''Twas trebly impolitic,' said Clousier. 'We have concluded the case for law and finance, now for the Government. The Royal power, weakened by the dogma of the national sovereignty, in virtue of which the election was made on the 9th of August 1830, will strive to overcome its rival, a principle which gives the people the right of changing a dynasty every time they fail to apprehend the intentions of their king; so there is a domestic struggle before us which will check progress in France for a long while yet.

'England has wisely steered clear of all these sunken rocks,' said Gérard. 'I have been in England. I admire the hive which sends swarms over the globe to settle and civilise. In England political debate is a comedy intended to satisfy the people and to hide the action of authority which moves untrammelled in its lofty sphere; election there, is not, as in France, the referring of a question to a stupid bourgeoisie. If the land were divided up, England would cease to exist at once. The great landowners and the lords control the machinery of Government. They have a navy which takes possession

of whole quarters of the globe (and under the very eyes of Europe) to fulfil the exigencies of their trade, and form colonies for the discontented and unsatisfactory. Instead of waging war on men of ability, annihilating and underrating them, the English aristocracy continually seeks them out, rewards and assimilates them. The English are prompt to act in all that concerns the Government, and in the choice of men and material, while with us action of any kind is slow; and yet they are slow, and we impatient. Capital with them is adventurous, and always moving; with us it is shy and suspicious. Here is corroboration of M. Grossetête's statements about the loss to industry of the peasants' capital; I can sketch the difference in a few words. English capital, which is constantly circulating, has created ten milliards of wealth in the shape of expanded manufactures and joint-stock companies paying dividends; while here in France, though we have more capital, it has not yielded one-tenth part of the profit.

'It is all the more extraordinary,' said Roubaud, 'since that they are lymphatic, and we are generally either sanguine or nervous.'

'Here is a great problem for you to study, monsieur,' said Clousier. 'Given a national temperament, to find the institutions best adapted to counteract it. Truly, Cromwell was a great legislator. He, one man, made England what she is by promulgating the *Act of Navigation*, which made the English the enemy of all other nations, and infused into them a fierce pride, that has served them as a lever. But in spite of their garrison at Malta, as soon as France and Russia fully understand the part to be played in politics by the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the discovery of a new route to Asia by way of Egypt or the Euphrates valley will be a death-blow to England, just as the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope was the ruin of Venice.'

'And nothing of God in all this!' cried the curé.

'M. Clousier and M. Roubaud are indifferent in matters of religion . . . and you, monsieur?' he asked questioningly, turning to Gérard.

'A Protestant,' said Grossetête.

'You guessed rightly!' exclaimed Véronique, with a glance at the curé as she offered her hand to Clousier to return to her apartments.

All prejudices excited by M. Gérard's appearance quickly vanished, and the three notables of Montégnac congratulated themselves on such an acquisition.

'Unluckily,' said M. Bonnet, 'there is a cause for antagonism between Russia and the Catholic countries on the shores of the Mediterranean; a schism of little real importance divides the Greek Church from the Latin, for the great misfortune of humanity.'

'Each preaches for his saint,' said Mme. Graslin, smiling. 'M. Grossetête thinks of lost milliards; M. Clousier of law in confusion; the doctor sees in legislation a question of temperaments; M. le Curé sees in religion an obstacle in the way of a good understanding between France and Russia.'

'Please add, madame,' said Gérard, 'that in the sequestration of capital by the peasant and small tradesman, I see the delay of the completion of railways in France——'

'Then what would you have?' asked she.

'Oh! The admirable Councillors of State who devised laws in the time of the Emperor and the *Corps législatif*, when those who had brains as well as those who had property had a voice in the election, a body whose sole function it was to oppose unwise laws or capricious wars. The present Chamber of Deputies is like to end, as you will see, by becoming the governing body, and legalised anarchy it will be.'

'Great heavens!' cried the curé in an access of lofty patriotism, 'how is it that minds so enlightened' —he indicated Clousier, Roubaud, and Gérard—'see

the evil, and point out the remedy, and do not begin by applying it to themselves? All of you represent the classes attacked; all of you recognise the necessity of passive obedience on the part of the great masses in the State, an obedience like that of the soldier in time of war; all of you desire the unity of authority, and wish that it shall never be called in question. But that consolidation to which England has attained through the development of pride and material interests (which are a sort of belief) can only be attained here by sentiments induced by Catholicism, and you are not Catholics! I the priest drop my character, and reason with rationalists.

'How can you expect the masses to become religious and to obey if they see irreligion and relaxed discipline around them? A people united by any faith will easily get the better of men without belief. The law of the interest of all, which underlies patriotism, is at once annulled by the law of individual interest, which authorises and implants selfishness. Nothing is solid and durable but that which is natural, and the natural basis of politics is the family. The family should be the basis of all institutions. A universal effect denotes a co-extensive cause. These things that you notice proceed from the social principle itself, which has no force, because it is based on independent opinion, and the right of private judgment is the forerunner of individualism. There is less wisdom in looking for the blessing of security from the intelligence and capacity of the majority, than in depending upon the intelligence of institutions and the capacity of one single man for the blessing of security. It is easier to find wisdom in one man than in a whole nation. The peoples have but a blind heart to guide them; they feel, but they do not see. A government must see, and must not be swayed by sentiments. There is therefore an evident contradiction between the first impulses of the masses and the action of authority which

must direct their energy and give it unity. To find a great prince is a great chance (to use your language), but to trust your destinies to any assembly of men, even if they are honest, is madness.

'France is mad at this moment! Alas! you are as thoroughly convinced of this as I. If all men who really believe what they say, as you do, would set the example in their own circle; if every intelligent thinker would set his hand to raising once more the altars of the great spiritual republic, of the one Church which has directed humanity, we might see once more in France the miracles wrought there by our fathers.'

'What would you have, M. le Curé?' said Gérard, 'if one must speak to you as in the confessional—I look on faith as a lie which you consciously tell yourself, on hope as a lie about the future, and on this charity of yours as a child's trick; one is a good boy, for the sake of the jam.'

'And yet, monsieur, when hope rocks us we sleep well,' said Mme. Graslin.

Roubaud, who was about to speak, supported by a glance from Grossetête and the cure, stopped short at the words.

'Is it any fault of ours,' said Clousier, 'if Jesus Christ had not time to formulate a system of government in accordance with His teaching, as Moses did and Confucius —the two greatest legislators whom the world has seen, for the Jews and the Chinese still maintain their national existence, though the first are scattered all over the earth, and the second an isolated people?'

'Ah! you are giving me a task indeed,' said the curé candidly, 'but I shall triumph, I shall convert all of you. . . . You are nearer the Faith than you think. Truth lurks beneath the lie; come forward but a step, and you return!'

And with this cry from the curé the conversation took a fresh direction.

The next morning before M. Grossetête went, he promised to take an active share in Véronique's schemes so soon as they should be judged practicable. Mme. Graslin and Gérard rode beside his travelling carriage as far as the point where the cross road joined the high-road from Bordeaux to Lyon. Gérard was so eager to see the place, and Véronique so anxious to show it to him, that this ride had been planned overnight. After they took leave of the kind old man, they galloped down into the great plain and skirted the hillsides that lay between the château and the Living Rock. The surveyor recognised the rock embankment which Farrabesche had pointed out; it stood up like the lowest course of masonry under the foundations of the hills, in such a sort that when the bed of this indestructible canal of nature's making should be cleared out, and the water-courses regulated so as not to choke it, irrigation would actually be facilitated by that long channel which lay about ten feet above the surface of the plain. The first thing to be done was to estimate the volume of water in the Gabou, and to make certain that the sides of the valley could hold it; no decision could be made till this was known.

Véronique gave a horse to Farrabesche, who was to accompany Gérard and acquaint him with the least details which he himself had observed. After some days of consideration Gérard thought the base of either parallel chains of hill solid enough (albeit of different material) to hold the water.

In the January of the following year, a wet season, Gérard calculated the probable amount of water discharged by the Gabou, and found that when the three water-courses had been diverted into the torrent, the total amount would be sufficient to water an area three times as great as the plain of Montégnac. The dams across the Gabou, the masonry and engineering works needed to bring the water-supply of the three little valleys into the plain, should not cost more than sixty thousand francs;

for the surveyor discovered a quantity of chalky deposit on the common, so that lime would be cheap, and the forest being so near at hand, stone and timber would cost nothing even for transport. All the preparations could be made before the Gabou ran dry, so that when the important work should be begun it should quickly be finished. But the plain was another matter. Gérard considered that there the first preparation would cost at least two hundred thousand francs, sowing and planting apart.

The plain was to be divided into four squares of two hundred and fifty acres each. There was no question of breaking up the waste ; the first thing to do was to remove the largest flints. Navvies would be employed to dig a great number of trenches and to line the channels with stone to keep the water in, for the water must be made to flow or to stand as required. All this work called for active, devoted, and painstaking workers. Chance so ordered it that the plain was a straightforward piece of work, a level stretch, and the water with a ten foot fall could be distributed at will. There was nothing to prevent the finest results in farming the land ; here there might be just such a splendid green carpet as in North Italy, a source of wealth and of pride to Lombardy. Gérard sent to his late district for an old and experienced foreman, Fresquin by name.

Mme. Graslin, therefore, wrote to ask Grossetête to negotiate for her a loan of two hundred and fifty thousand francs on the security of her Government stock ; the interest of six years, Gérard calculated, should pay off the debt, capital and interest. The loan was concluded in the course of the month of March ; and by that time Gérard, with Fresquin's assistance, had finished all the preliminary operations, levelling, boring, observations, and estimates. The news of the great scheme had spread through the country and roused the poor people ; and the indefatigable Farrabesche, Colorat, Clousier,

Roubaud, and the Mayor of Montégnac, all those, in fact, who were interested in the enterprise for its own sake or for Mme. Graslin's, chose the workers or gave the names of the poor who deserved to be employed.

Gérard bought partly for M. Grossetête, partly on his own account, some thousand acres of land on the other side of the road through Montégnac. Fresquin, his foreman, also took five hundred acres, and sent for his wife and children.

In the early days of April 1833, M. Grossetête came to Montégnac to see the land purchased for him by Gérard; but the principal motive of his journey was the arrival of Catherine Curieux. She had come by the diligence from Paris to Limoges, and Mme. Graslin was expecting her. Grossetête found Mme. Graslin about to start for the church. M. Bonnet was to say a mass to ask the blessing of Heaven on the work about to begin. All the men, women, and children were present.

M. Grossetête brought forward a woman of thirty or thereabouts, who looked weak and out of health. 'Here is your *protégé*,' he said, addressing Véronique.

'Are you Catherine Curieux?' Mme. Graslin asked.

'Yes, madame.'

For a moment Véronique looked at her; Catherine was rather tall, shapely, and pale; the exceeding sweetness of her features was not belied by the beautiful soft grey eyes. In the shape of her face and the outlines of her forehead there was a nobleness, a sort of grave and simple majesty, sometimes seen in very young girls' faces in the country, a kind of flower of beauty, which field work, and the constant wear of household cares, and sunburn, and neglect of appearance, wither with alarming rapidity. From her attitude as she stood it was easy to discern that she would move with the ease of a daughter of the fields and something of an added grace, unconsciously learned in Paris. If Catherine had never left the Corrèze, she would no doubt have been by this time

a wrinkled and withered woman, the bright tints in her face would have grown hard; but Paris, which had toned down the high colour, had preserved her beauty; and ill-health, weariness, and sorrow had given to her the mysterious gifts of melancholy and of that inner life of thought denied to poor toilers in the field who lead an almost animal existence. Her dress likewise marked a distinction between her and the peasants; for it abundantly displayed the Parisian taste which even the least coquettish women are so quick to acquire. Catherine Curieux, not knowing what might await her, and unable to judge the lady in whose presence she stood, seemed somewhat embarrassed.

'Do you still love Farrabesche?' asked Mme. Graslin, when Grossetête left the two women together for a moment.

'Yes, madame,' she answered, flushing red.

'But if you sent him a thousand francs while he was in prison, why did you not come to him when he came out? Do you feel any repugnance for him? Speak to me as you would to your own mother. Were you afraid that he had gone utterly to the bad? that he cared for you no longer?'

'No, madame; but I can neither read nor write. I was living with a very exacting old lady; she fell ill; we sat up with her of a night, and I had to nurse her. I knew the time was coming near when Jacques would be out of prison, but I could not leave Paris until the lady died. She left me nothing, after all my devotion to her and her interests. I had made myself ill with sitting up with her and the hard work of nursing, and I wanted to get well again before I came back. I spent all my savings, and then I made up my mind to go into the Hôpital Saint-Louis, and have just been discharged as cured.'

Mme. Graslin was touched by an explanation so simple.

'Well, but, my dear,' she said, 'tell me why you left your people so suddenly; what made you leave your child? why did you not send them news of you, or get some one to write——'

For all answer, Catherine wept.

'Madame,' she said at last, reassured by the pressure of Véronique's hand, 'I daresay I was wrong, but it was more than I could do to stop in the place. It was not that I felt that I had done wrong; it was the rest of them; I was afraid of their gossip and talk. So long as Jacques was here in danger, he could not do without me; but when he was gone, I felt as if I could not stop. There was I, a girl with a child and no husband! The lowest creature would have been better than I. If I had heard them say the least word about Benjamin or his father, I do not know what I should have done. I should have killed myself perhaps, or gone out of my mind. My own father or mother might have said something hasty in a moment of anger. Meek as I am, I am too irritable to bear hasty words or insult. I have been well punished; I could not see my child, and never a day passed but I thought of him! I wanted to be forgotten, and forgotten I am. Nobody has given me a thought. They thought I was dead, and yet many and many a time I felt I could like to leave everything to have one day here and see my little boy——'

'Your little boy—see, Catherine, here he is!'

Catherine looked up and saw Benjamin, and something like a feverish shiver ran through her.

'Benjamin,' said Mme. Graslin, 'come and kiss your mother.'

'My mother?' cried Benjamin in amazement. He flung his arms round Catherine's neck, and she clasped him to her with wild energy. But the boy escaped, and ran away crying, 'I will find *him!*'

Mme. Graslin, seeing that Catherine's strength was failing, made her sit down; and as she did so her eyes

met M. Bonnet's look, her colour rose, for in that keen glance her confessor read her heart. She spoke tremulously.

'I hope, M. le Curé,' she said, 'that you will marry Catherine and Farrabesche at once.—Do you not remember M. Bonnet, my child? He will tell you that Farrabesche has behaved himself like an honest man since he came back. Every one in the countryside respects him; if there is a place in the world where you may live happily with the good opinion of every one about you, it is here in Montégnac. With God's will, you will make your fortune here, for you shall be my tenants. Farrabesche has all his citizen's rights again.'

'This is all true, my daughter,' said the cure.

As he spoke, Farrabesche came in, led by his eager son. Face to face with Catherine in Mme. Graslin's presence, his face grew white, and he was mute. He saw how active the kindness of the one had been for him, and guessed all that the other had suffered in her enforced absence. Véronique turned to go with M. Bonnet, and the curé for his part wished to take Véronique aside. As soon as they were out of hearing, Véronique's confessor looked full at her and saw her colour rise; she lowered her eyes like a guilty creature.

'You are degrading charity,' he said severely.

'And how?' she asked, raising her head.

'Charity,' said M. Bonnet, 'is a passion as far greater than love, as humanity, madame, is greater than one human creature. All this is not the spontaneous work of disinterested virtue. You are falling from the grandeur of the service of man to the service of a single creature. In your kindness to Catherine and Farrabesche there is an alloy of memories and after-thoughts which spoils it in the sight of God. Pluck out the rest of the dart of the spirit of evil from your heart. Do not spoil the value of your good deeds in this way. Will you ever attain at last to that holy ignorance of the

good that you do, which is the supreme grace of man's actions?'

Mme. Graslin turned away to dry her eyes. Her tears told the curé that his words had reached and probed some unhealed wound in her heart. Farrabesche, Catherine, and Benjamin came to thank their benefactress, but she made a sign to them to go away and leave her with M. Bonnet.

'You see how I have hurt them,' she said, bidding him see their disappointed faces. And the tender-hearted curé beckoned to them to come back.

'You must be completely happy,' she said.—'Here is the patent which gives you back all your rights as a citizen, and exempts you from the old humiliating formalities,' she added, holding out to Farrabesche a paper which she had kept. Farrabesche kissed Véronique's hand. There was an expression of submissive affection and quiet devotion in his eyes, the devotion which nothing could change, the fidelity of a dog for his master.

'If Jacques has suffered much, madame, I hope that it will be possible for me to make up to him in happiness for the trouble he has been through,' said Catherine; 'for whatever he may have done, he is not bad.'

Mme. Graslin turned away her head. The sight of their happiness seemed to crush her. M. Bonnet left her to go to the church, and she dragged herself thither on M. Grossetête's arm.

After breakfast, every one went to see the work begun. All the old people of Montégnac were likewise present. Véronique stood between M. Grossetête and M. Bonnet on the top of the steep slope which the new road ascended, whence they could see the alignment of the four new roads, which served as a deposit for the stones taken off the land. Five navvies were clearing a space of eighteen feet (the width of each road), and throwing up a sort of embankment of good soil as they worked. Four men on

either side were engaged in making a ditch, and these also made a bank of fertile earth along the edge of the field. Behind them came two men, who dug holes at intervals, and planted trees. In each division, thirty labourers (chosen from among the poor), twenty women, and forty girls and children, eighty-six workers in all, were busy piling up the stones which the workmen riddled out along the bank so as to measure the quantity produced by each group. In this way all went abreast, and with such picked and enthusiastic workers rapid progress was being made. Grossetête promised to send some trees, and to ask for more, among Mme. Graslin's friends. It was evident that there would not be enough in the nursery plantations at the château to supply such a demand.

Towards the end of the day, which was to finish with a great dinner at the château, Farrabesche begged to speak with Mme. Graslin for a moment. Catherine came with him.

'Madame,' he said, 'you were so kind as to promise me the home farm. You meant to help me to a fortune when you granted me such a favour, but I have come round to Catherine's ideas about our future. If I did well there, there would be jealousy; a word is soon said; I might find things unpleasant, I am afraid, and besides, Catherine would never feel comfortable; it would be better for us to keep to ourselves, in fact. So I have come just to ask you if you will give us the land about the mouth of the Gabou, near the common, to farm instead, and a little bit of the wood yonder under the Living Rock. You will have a lot of workmen thereabouts in July, and it would be easy then to build a farmhouse on a knoll in a good situation. We should be very happy. I would send for Guépin, poor fellow, when he comes out of prison; he would work like a horse, and it is likely I might find a wife for him. My man is no do-nothing. No one will come up there to stare

at us; we will colonise that bit of land, and it will be my great ambition to make a famous farm for you there. Besides, I have come to suggest a tenant for your great farm—a cousin of Catherine's, who has a little money of his own; he will be better able than I to look after such a big concern as that. In five years' time, please God, you will have five or six thousand head of cattle or horses down there in the plain that they are breaking up, and it will really take a good head to look after it all.'

Mme. Graslin recognised the good sense of Farrabesche's request, and granted it.

As soon as a beginning was made in the plain, Mme. Graslin fell into the even ways of a country life. She went to mass in the morning, watched over the education of the son whom she idolised, and went to see her workmen. After dinner she was at home to her friends in the little drawing-room on the first floor of the centre tower. She taught Roubaud, Clousier, and the curé whist—Gérard knew the game already—and when the party broke up towards nine o'clock, every one went home. The only events in the pleasant life were the successes of the different parts of the great enterprise.

June came, the bed of the Gabou was dry, Gérard had taken up his quarters in the old keeper's cottage; for Farrabesche's farmhouse was finished by this time, and fifty masons, returned from Paris, were building a wall across the valley from side to side. The masonry was twenty feet thick at the base, gradually sloping away to half that thickness at the top, and the whole length of it was embedded in twelve feet of solid concrete. On the side of the valley Gérard added a course of concrete with a sloping surface twelve feet thick at the base, and a similar support on the side nearest the commons, covered with leaf-mould several feet deep, made a substantial barrier which the flood water could not break through. In case of a very wet season, Gérard contrived a channel at a suitable height for the overflow. Every-

where the masonry was carried down on the solid rock, (granite, or tufa), that the water might not escape at the sides. By the middle of August the dam was finished. Meanwhile, Gérard also prepared three channels in the three principal valleys, and all of the undertakings cost less than the estimate. In this way the farm by the château could be put in working order.

The irrigation channels in the plain under Fresquin's superintendence corresponded with the natural canal at the base of the hills; all the water-courses departed thence. The great abundance of flints enabled him to pave all the channels, and sluices were constructed so that the water might be kept at the required height in them.

Every Sunday after mass Véronique went down through the park with Gérard and the curé, the doctor, and the mayor, to see how the system of water supply was working. The winter of 1833-1834 was very wet. The water from the three streams had been turned into the torrent, and the flood had made the valley of the Gabou into three lakes, arranged of set design one above the other, so as to form a reserve for times of great drought. In places where the valley widened out, Gérard had taken advantage of one or two knolls to make an island here and there, and to plant them with different trees. This vast engineering operation had completely altered the appearance of the landscape, but it would still be five or six years before it would take its true character.

'The land was quite naked,' Farrabesche used to say, 'and now madame has clothed it.' After all these great changes, every one spoke of Véronique as 'madame' in the countryside. When the rains ceased in June 1834, trial was made of the irrigation system in the part of the plain where seed had been sown; and the green growth thus watered was of the same fine quality as in an Italian *marcita*, or a Swiss meadow. The method in

use on farms in Lombardy had been employed ; the whole surface was kept evenly moist, and the plain was as even as a carpet. The nitre in the snow, dissolved in the water, doubtless contributed not a little to the fineness of the grass. Gérard hoped that the produce would be something like that of Switzerland, where, as is well known, this substance is an inexhaustible source of riches. The trees planted along the road sides, drawing water sufficient from the ditches, made rapid progress. So it came to pass that in 1838, five years after Mme. Graslin came to Montégnac, the waste land, condemned as sterile by twenty generations, was a green and fertile plain, the whole of it under cultivation.

Gérard had built houses for five farms, besides the large one at the château ; Gérard's farm, like Grossetête's and Fresquin's, received the overflow from Mme. Graslin's estate ; they were conducted on the same methods, and laid out on the same lines. Gérard built a charming lodge on his own property.

When all was finished, the township of Montégnac acted on the suggestion of its mayor, who was delighted to resign his office to Gérard, and the surveyor became mayor in his stead.

In 1840 the departure of the first herd of fat cattle sent from Montégnac to the Paris markets was an occasion for a rural fête. Cattle and horses were raised on the farms in the plain ; for when the ground was cleared, seven inches of mould were usually found, which were manured by pasturing cattle on them, and continually enriched by the leaves that fell every autumn from the trees, and, first and foremost, by the melted snow-water from the reservoirs in the Gabou.

It was in this year that Mme. Graslin decided that a tutor must be found for her son, now eleven years old. She was unwilling to part with him, and yet desired to make a well-educated man of her boy. M. Bonnet wrote to the seminary. Mme. Graslin, on her side, let

fall a few words concerning her wishes and her difficulty to Monseigneur Dutheil, recently appointed to an archbishopric. It was a great and serious matter to make choice of a man who must spend at least nine months out of twelve at the château. Gérard had offered already to ground his friend Francis in mathematics, but it was impossible to do without a tutor; and this choice that she must make was the more formidable to Mme. Graslin, because she knew that her health was giving way. As the value of the land in her beloved Montégnac increased, she redoubled the secret austerities of her life.

Monseigneur Dutheil, with whom Mme. Graslin still corresponded, found her the man for whom she wished. He sent a schoolmaster named Ruffin from his own diocese. Ruffin was a young man of five-and-twenty with a genius for private teaching; he was widely read; in spite of an excessive sensibility, could, when necessary, show himself sufficiently severe for the education of a child, nor was his piety in any way prejudicial to his knowledge; finally, he was patient and pleasant-looking.

'This is a real gift which I am sending you, my dear daughter,' so the Archbishop wrote; 'the young man is worthy to be the tutor of a prince, so I count upon you to secure his future, for he will be your son's spiritual father.'

M. Ruffin was so much liked by Mme. Graslin's little circle of faithful friends, that his coming made no change in the various intimacies of those who grouped about their idol, seized with a sort of jealousy on the hours and moments spent with her.

The year 1843 saw the prosperity of Montégnac increasing beyond all hopes. The farm on the Gabou rivalled the farms on the plain, and the château led the way in all improvements. The five other farms, which

by the terms of the lease paid an increasing rent, and would each bring in the sum of thirty thousand francs in twelve years' time, then brought in sixty thousand francs a year all told. The farmers were just beginning to reap the benefits of their self-denial and Mme. Graslin's sacrifices, and could afford to manure the meadows in the plain where the finest crops grew without fear of dry seasons. The Gabou farm paid its first rent of four thousand francs joyously.

It was in this year that a man in Montégnac started a *diligence* between the chief town in the arrondissement and Limoges; a coach ran either way daily. M. Clousier's nephew sold his clerkship and obtained permission to practise as a notary, and Fresquin was appointed to be tax-collector in the canton. Then the new notary built himself a pretty house in upper Montégnac, planted mulberry trees on his land, and became Gérard's deputy. And Gérard himself, grown bold with success, thought of a plan which was to bring Mme. Graslin a colossal fortune; for this year she paid off her loan, and began to receive interest from her investment in the funds. This was Gérard's scheme: He would turn the little river into a canal, by diverting the abundant water of the Gabou into it. This canal should effect a junction with the Vienne, and in this way it would be possible to exploit twenty thousand acres of the vast forest of Montégnac. The woods were admirably superintended by Colorat, but hitherto had brought in nothing on account of the difficulty of transport. With this arrangement it would be possible to fell a thousand acres every year (thus dividing the forest into twenty strips for successive cuttings), and the valuable timber for building purposes could be sent by water to Limoges. This had been Graslin's plan; he had scarcely listened to the curé's projects for the plain, he was far more interested in the scheme for making a canal of the little river.

V

VÉRONIQUE IS LAID IN THE TOMB.

In the beginning of the following year, in spite of Mme. Graslin's bearing, her friends saw warning signs that death was near. To all Roubaud's observations, as to the utmost ingenuity of the most keen-sighted questioners, Véronique gave but one answer, 'She felt wonderfully well.' Yet that spring, when she revisited forest and farms and her rich meadows, it was with a childlike joy that plainly spoke of sad forebodings.

Gérard had been obliged to make a low wall of concrete from the dam across the Gabou to the park at Montégnac along the base of the lower slope of the hill of the Corrèze; this had suggested an idea to him. He would enclose the whole forest of Montégnac, and throw the park into it. Mme. Graslin put by thirty thousand francs a year for this purpose. It would take seven years to complete the wall; but when it was finished, the splendid forest would be exempted from the dues claimed by the Government over unenclosed woods and lands, and the three ponds in the Gabou valley would lie within the circuit of the park. Each of the ponds, proudly dubbed 'a lake,' had its island. This year, too, Gérard, in concert with Grossetête, prepared a surprise for Mme. Graslin's birthday; he had built on the second and largest island a little *Chartreuse*—a summer-house, satisfactorily rustic without, and perfectly elegant within. The old banker was in the plot, so were Farrabesche, Fresquin, and Clousier's nephew, and most of the well-to-do folk in Montégnac. Grossetête sent the pretty furniture. The bell tower, copied from the tower of Vevay, produced a charming effect in the landscape. Six boats (two for each lake) had been secretly built,

rigged, and painted during the winter by Farrabesche and Guépin, with some help from the village carpenter at Montégnac.

So one morning in the middle of May, after Mme. Graslin's friends had breakfasted with her, they led her out into the park, which Gérard had managed for the last five years as architect and naturalist. It had been admirably laid out, sloping down towards the pleasant meadows in the Gabou valley, where below, on the first lake, two boats were in readiness for them. The meadowland, watered by several clear streams, had been taken in at the base of the great amphitheatre at the head of the Gabou valley. The woods round about them had been carefully thinned and disposed with a view to the effect; here the shapeliest masses of trees, there a charming inlet of meadow; there was an air of loneliness about the forest-surrounded space which soothed the soul.

On a bit of rising ground by the lake Gérard had carefully reproduced the chalet which all travellers see and admire on the road to Brieg through the Rhone valley. This was to be the château, dairy, and cowshed. From the balcony there was a view over this landscape created by the engineer's art, a view comparable, since the lakes had been made, to the loveliest Swiss scenery.

It was a glorious day. Not a cloud in the blue sky, and on the earth beneath, the myriad gracious chance effects that the fair May month can give. Light wreaths of mist, risen from the lake, still hung like a thin smoke about the trees by the water's edge—willows and weeping willows, ash and alder and abeles, Lombard and Canadian poplars, white and pink hawthorn, birch and acacia, had been grouped about the lake, as the nature of the ground and the trees themselves (all finely-grown specimens now ten years old) suggested. The high green wall of forest trees was reflected in the sheet of water, clear as a

mirror, and serene as the sky; their topmost crests, clearly outlined in that limpid atmosphere, stood out in contrast with the thickets below them, veiled in delicate green undergrowth. The lakes, divided by strongly-built embankments with a causeway along them that served as a short cut from side to side of the valley, lay like three mirrors, each with a different reflecting surface, the water trickling from one to another in musical cascades. And beyond this, from the chalet you caught a glimpse of the bleak and barren common lands, the pale chalky soil (seen from the balcony) looked like a wide sea, and supplied a contrast with the fresh greenery about the lake. Véronique saw the gladness in her friends' faces as their hands were held out to assist her to enter the larger boat, tears rose to her eyes, and they rowed on in silence until they reached the first causeway. Here they landed, to embark again on the second lake; and Véronique, looking up, saw the summer-house on the island, and Grossetête and his family sitting on a bench before it.

'They are determined to make me regret life, it seems,' she said, turning to the curé.

'We want to keep you among us,' Clousier said.

'There is no putting life into the dead,' she answered; but at M. Bonnet's look of rebuke, she withdrew into herself again.

'Simply let me have the charge of your health,' pleaded Roubaud in a gentle voice; 'I am sure that I could preserve her who is the living glory of the canton, the common bond that unites the lives of all our friends.'

Véronique bent her head, while Gérard rowed slowly out towards the island in the middle of the sheet of water, the largest of the three. The upper lake chanced to be too full; the distant murmur of the weir seemed to find a voice for the lovely landscape.

'You did well indeed to bring me here to bid farewell to this entrancing view!' she said, as she saw the beauty

of the trees so full of leaves that they hid the bank on either side.

The only sign of disapprobation which Véronique's friends permitted themselves was a gloomy silence; and, at a second glance from M. Bonnet, she sprang lightly from the boat with an apparent gaiety, which she sustained. Once more she became the lady of the manor, and so charming was she, that the Grossetête family thought that they saw in her the beautiful Mme. Graslin of old days.

'Assuredly, you may live yet,' her mother said in Véronique's ear.

On that pleasant festival day, in the midst of a scene sublimely transformed by the use of Nature's own resources, how should anything wound Véronique? Yet then and there she received her deathblow.

It had been arranged that the party should return home towards nine o'clock by way of the meadows; for the roads, quite as fine as any in England or Italy, were the pride of their engineer. There were flints in abundance; as the stones were taken off the land they had been piled in heaps by the roadside; and with such plenty of road metal, it was so easy to keep the ways in good order, that in five years' time they were in a manner macadamised. Carriages were waiting for the party at the lower end of the valley nearest the plain, almost under the Living Rock. The horses had all been bred in Montégnac. Their trial formed part of the programme for the day; for these were the first that were ready for sale, the manager of the stud having just sent ten of them up to the stables of the château. Four handsome animals in light and plain harness were to draw Mme. Graslin's calèche, a present from Grossetête.

After dinner the joyous company went to take coffee on a promontory where a little wooden kiosk had been erected, a copy of one on the shores of the Bosphorus. From this point there was a wide outlook over the lowest

lake, stretching away to the great barrier across the Gabou, now covered thickly with a luxuriant growth of green, a charming spot for the eyes to rest upon. Colorat's house and the old cottage, now restored, were the only buildings in the landscape; Colorat's capacities were scarcely adequate for the difficult post of head forester in Montégnac, so he had succeeded to Farrabesche's office.

From this point Mme. Graslin fancied that she could see Francis near Farrabesche's nursery of saplings; she looked for the child, and could not find him, till M. Ruffin pointed him out, playing on the brink of the lake with M. Grossetête's great-grandchildren. Véronique felt afraid that some accident might happen, and without listening to remonstrances, sprang into one of the boats, landed on the causeway, and herself hurried away in search of her son. This little incident broke up the party on the island. Grossetête, now a venerable great-grandfather, was the first to suggest a walk along the beautiful field path that wound up and down by the side of the lower lakes.

Mme. Graslin saw Francis a long way off. He was with a woman in mourning, who had thrown her arms about him. She seemed to be from a foreign country, judging by her dress and the shape of her hat. Véronique in dismay called her son to her.

'Who is that woman?' she asked of the other children; 'and why did Francis go away from you?'

'The lady called him by his name,' said one of the little girls. Mme. Sauviat and Gérard, who were ahead of the others, came up at that moment.

'Who is that woman, dear?' said Mme. Graslin, turning to Francis.

'I do not know,' he said, 'but no one kisses me like that except you and grandmamma. She was crying,' he added in his mother's ear.

'Shall I run and fetch her?' asked Gérard.

'No!' said Mme. Graslin, with a curtness very unusual with her.

With kindly tact, which Véronique appreciated, Gérard took the little ones with him and went back to meet the others; so that Mme. Sauviat, Mme. Graslin, and Francis were left together.

'What did she say to you?' asked Mme. Sauviat, addressing her grandson.

'I don't know. She did not speak French.'

'Did you not understand anything she said?' asked Véronique.

'Oh yes; one thing she said over and over again, that is how I can remember it—*dear brother!* she said.'

Véronique leant on her mother's arm and took her child's hand, but she could scarcely walk, and her strength failed her.

'What is it? . . . What has happened?' . . . every one asked of Mme. Sauviat.

A cry broke from the old Auvergnate: 'Oh! my daughter is in danger!' she exclaimed, in her guttural accent and deep voice.

Mme. Graslin had to be carried to her carriage. She ordered Aline to keep beside Francis, and beckoned to Gérard.

'You have been in England, I believe,' she said, when she had recovered herself; 'do you understand English? What do these words mean—*dear brother*?'

'That is very simple,' said Gérard, and he explained.

Véronique exchanged glances with Aline and Mme. Sauviat; the two women shuddered, but controlled their feelings. Mme. Graslin sank into a torpor from which nothing roused her; she did not heed the gleeful voices as the carriages started, nor the splendour of the sunset light on the meadows, the even pace of the horses, nor the laughter of the friends who followed them on horseback at a gallop. Her mother bade the man drive faster, and her carriage was the first to reach the

château. When the rest arrived they were told that Véronique had gone to her room, and would see no one.

'I am afraid that Mme. Graslin must have received a fatal wound,' Gérard began, speaking to his friends.

'Where? . . . How?' asked they.

'In the heart,' answered Gérard.

Two days later Roubaud set out for Paris. He had seen that Mme. Graslin's life was in danger, and to save her he had gone to summon the first doctor in Paris to give his opinion of the case. But Véronique had only consented to see Roubaud to put an end to the importunities of Aline and her mother, who begged her to be more careful of herself; she knew that she was dying. She declined to see M. Bonnet, saying that the time had not yet come; and although all the friends who had come from Limoges for her birthday festival were anxious to stay with her, she entreated them to pardon her if she could not fulfil the duties of hospitality, but she needed the most profound solitude. So, after Roubaud's sudden departure, the guests left the château of Montégnac and went back to Limoges, not so much in disappointment as in despair, for all who had come with Grossetête adored Véronique, and were utterly at a loss as to the cause of this mysterious disaster.

One evening, two days after Grossetête's large family party had left the château, Aline brought a visitor to Mme. Graslin's room. It was Catherine Farrabesche. At first Catherine stood glued to the spot, so astonished was she at this sudden change in her mistress, the features so drawn.

'Good God! madame, what harm that poor girl has done! If only we could have known, Farrabesche and I, we would never have taken her in. She has just heard that madame is ill, and sent me to tell Mme. Sauviat that she should like to speak to her.'

'*Here!*' cried Véronique. 'Where is she at this moment?'

'My husband took her over to the chalet.'

'Good,' said Mme. Graslin; 'leave us, and tell Farrabesche to go. Tell the lady to wait, and my mother will go to see her.'

At nightfall Véronique, leaning on her mother's arm, crept slowly across the park to the chalet. The moon shone with its most brilliant glory, the night air was soft; the two women, both shaken with emotion that they could not conceal, received in some sort the encouragement of Nature. From moment to moment Mme. Sauviat stopped and made her daughter rest; for Véronique's sufferings were so poignant that it was nearly midnight before they reached the path that turned down through the wood to the meadows, where the chalet roof sparkled like silver. The moonlight on the surface of the still water lent it a pearly hue. The faint noises of the night, which travel so far in the silence, made up a delicate harmony of sound.

Véronique sat down on the bench outside the chalet in the midst of the glorious spectacle beneath the starry skies. The murmur of two voices and footfalls on the sands made by two persons still some distance away was borne to her by the water, which transmits every sound in the stillness as faithfully as it reflects everything in its calm surface. There was an exquisite quality in the intonation of one of the voices, by which Véronique recognised the curé, and with the rustle of his cassock was blended the light sound of a silk dress. Evidently there was a woman.

'Let us go in,' she said to her mother. Mme. Sauviat and Véronique sat down on a manger in the low, large room built for a cowshed.

'I am not blaming you at all, my child,' the curé was saying; 'but you may be the cause of an irreparable misfortune, for she is the life and soul of this countryside.'

'Oh, monsieur! I will go to-night, 'the stranger woman's voice answered; 'but—I can say this to you—

it will be like death to me to leave my country a second time. If I had stayed a day longer in that horrible New York or in the United States, where there is neither hope nor faith nor charity, I should have died, without any illness. The air I was breathing hurt my chest, the food did me no good, I was dying though I looked full of life and health. When I stepped on board the suffering ceased; I felt as if I were in France. Ah, monsieur! I have seen my mother and my brother's wife die of grief. And then my grandfather and grandmother Tascheron died—died, dear M. Bonnet, in spite of the unheard-of prosperity of Tascheronville. . . . Yes. Our father began a settlement, a village in Ohio, and now the village is almost a town. One-third of the land thereabouts belongs to our family, for God has watched over us all along, and the farms have done well, our crops are magnificent, and we are rich—so rich that we managed to build a Catholic church. The whole town is Catholic; we will not allow any other worship, and we hope to convert all the endless sects about us by our example. The true faith is in a minority in that dreary mercenary land of the dollar, a land which chills one to the soul. Still I would go back to die there sooner than do the least harm here or give the slightest pain to the mother of our dear Francis. Only take me to the parsonage house to-night, dear M. Bonnet, so that I can pray awhile on *his* grave; it was just that that drew me here, for as I came nearer and nearer the place where *he* lies I felt quite a different being. No, I did not believe I should feel so happy here——'

'Very well,' said the curé; 'come, let us go. If at some future day you can come back without evil consequences, I will write to tell you, Denise; but perhaps after this visit to your old home you may feel able to live yonder without suffering——'

'Leave this country now when it is so beautiful here! Just see what Mme. Graslin has made of the Gabou!'

she added, pointing to the moonlit lake. 'And then all this will belong to our dear Francis——'

'You shall not go, Denise,' said Mme. Graslin, appearing in the stable doorway.

Jean-François Tascheron's sister clasped her hands at the sight of this ghost who spoke to her; for Véronique's white face in the moonlight looked unsubstantial as a shadow against the dark background of the open stable door. Her eyes glittered like two stars.

'No, child, you shall not leave the country you have travelled so far to see, and you shall be happy here, unless God should refuse to second my efforts; for God, no doubt, has sent you here, Denise.'

She took the astonished girl's hand in hers, and went with her down the path towards the opposite shore of the lake. Mme. Sauviat and the curé, left alone, sat down on the bench.

'Let her have her way,' murmured Mme. Sauviat.

A few minutes later Véronique returned alone; her mother and the curé brought her back to the château. Doubtless she had thought of some plan of action which suited the mystery, for nobody saw Denise, no one knew that she had come back.

Mme. Graslin took to her bed, nor did she leave it. Every day she grew worse. It seemed to vex her that she could not rise, for again and again she made vain efforts to get up and take a walk in the park. One morning in early June, some days after that night at the chalet, she made a violent effort and rose and tried to dress herself, as if for a festival. She begged Gérard to lend her his arm; for her friends came daily for news of her, and when Aline said that her mistress meant to go out they all hurried up to the château. Mme. Graslin had summoned all her remaining strength to spend it on this last walk. She gained her object by a violent spasmodic effort of the will, inevitably followed by a deadly reaction.

'Let us go to the chalet—and alone,' she said to Gérard. The tones of her voice were soft, and there was something like coquetry in her glance. 'This is my last escapade, for I dreamed last night that the doctors had come.'

'Would you like to see your woods?' asked Gérard.

'For the last time. But,' she added, in coaxing tones, 'I have some strange proposals to make to you.'

Gérard, by her direction, rowed her across the second lake, when she had reached it on foot. He was at a loss to understand such a journey, but she indicated the summer-house as their destination, and he plied his oars.

There was a long pause. Her eyes wandered over the hillsides, the water, and the sky; then she spoke—

'My friend, it is a strange request that I am about to make to you, but I think that you are the man to obey me.'

'In everything,' he said, 'sure as I am that you cannot will anything but good.'

'I want you to marry,' she said; 'you will fulfil the wishes of a dying woman, who is certain that she is securing your happiness.'

'I am too ugly!' said Gérard.

'*She* is pretty, she is young, she wants to live in Montégnac; and if you marry her, you will do something towards making my last moments easier. We need not discuss her qualities. I tell you this, that she is a woman of a thousand; and as for her charms, youth, and beauty, the first sight will suffice, we shall see her in a moment in the summer-house. On our way back you shall give me your answer, a "Yes" or a "No," in sober earnest.'

Mme. Graslin smiled as she saw the oars move more swiftly after this confidence. Denise, who was living out of sight in the island sanctuary, saw Mme. Graslin, and hurried to the door. Véronique and Gérard came in. In spite of herself, the poor girl flushed as she met

the eyes that Gérard turned upon her; Denise's beauty was an agreeable surprise to him.

'La Curieux does not let you want for anything, does she?' asked Véronique.

'Look, madame,' said Denise, pointing to the breakfast table.

'This is M. Gérard, of whom I have spoken to you,' Véronique went on. 'He will be my son's guardian, and when I am dead you will all live together at the château until Francis comes of age.'

'Oh, madame! don't talk like that.'

'Just look at me, child!' said Véronique, and all at once she saw tears in the girl's eyes.—'She comes from New York,' she added, turning to Gérard.

This by way of putting both on a footing of acquaintance. Gérard asked questions of Denise, and Mme. Graslin left them to chat, going to look out over the view of the last lake on the Gabou. At six o'clock Gérard and Véronique rowed back to the chalet.

'Well?' queried she, looking at her friend.

'You have my word.'

'You may be without prejudices,' Véronique began, 'but you ought to know how it was that she was obliged to leave the country, poor child, brought back by a homesick longing.'

'A slip.'

'Oh no,' said Véronique, 'or should I introduce her to you? She is the sister of a working man who died on the scaffold . . .'

'Oh! Tascheron, who murdered old Pingret——'

'Yes. She is a murderer's sister,' said Mme. Graslin, with inexpressible irony in her voice; 'you can take back your word.'

She went no further. Gérard was compelled to carry her to the bench at the chalet, and for some minutes she lay there unconscious. Gérard, kneeling beside her, said, as soon as she opened her eyes—

'I will marry Denise.'

Mme. Graslin made him rise, she took his head in her hands, and set a kiss on his forehead. Then, seeing that he was astonished to be thus thanked, she grasped his hand and said—

'You will soon know the meaning of this puzzle. Let us try to reach the terrace again, our friends are there. It is very late, and I feel very weak, and yet, I should like to bid farewell from afar to this dear plain of mine.'

The weather had been intolerably hot all day; and though the storms, which did so much damage that year in different parts of Europe and in France itself, respected the Limousin, there had been thunder along the Loire, and the air began to grow fresher. The sky was so pure that the least details on the horizon were sharp and clear. What words can describe the delicious concert of sounds, the smothered hum of the township, now alive with workers returning from the fields? It would need the combined work of a great landscape painter and a painter of figures to do justice to such a picture. Is there not, in fact, a subtle connection between the lassitude of Nature and the labourer's weariness, an affinity of mood hardly to be rendered? In the tepid twilight of the dog days, the rarefied air gives its full significance to the least sound made by every living thing.

The women sit chatting at their doors with a bit of work even then in their hands, as they wait for the goodman who, probably, will bring the children home. The smoke going up from the roofs is the sign of the last meal of the day and the gayest for the peasants; after it they will sleep. The stir at that hour is the expression of happy and tranquil thoughts in those who have finished their day's work. There is a very distinct difference between their evening and morning snatches of song; for in this the village folk are like the birds, the last twitterings at night are utterly unlike their notes at

dawn. All Nature joins in the hymn of rest at the end of the day, as in the hymn of gladness at sunrise; all things take the softly blended hues that the sunset throws across the fields, tingeing the dusty roads with mellow light. If any should be bold enough to deny the influences of the fairest hour of the day, the very flowers would convict him of falsehood, intoxicating him with their subtlest scents, mingled with the tenderest sounds of insects the amorous faint twitter of birds.

Thin films of mist hovered above the 'water-lanes' that furrowed the plain below the township. The poplars and acacias and sumach trees, planted in equal numbers along the roads, had grown so tall already that they shaded it, and in the wide fields on either side the large and celebrated herds of cattle were scattered about in groups, some still browsing, others chewing the cud. Men, women, and children were busy getting in the last of the hay, the most picturesque of all field work. The evening air, less languid since the sudden breath of coolness after the storms, bore the wholesome scents of mown grass and swathes of hay. The least details in the beautiful landscape stood out perfectly sharp and clear.

There was some fear for the weather. The ricks were being finished in all haste; men hurried about them with loaded forks, raked the heaps together, and loaded the carts. Out in the distance the scythes were still busy, the women were turning the long swathes that looked like hatched lines across the fields into dotted rows of haycocks.

Sounds of laughter came up from the hayfields, the workers frolicked over their work, the children shouted as they buried each other in the heaps. Every figure was distinct, the women's petticoats, pink, red, or blue, their kerchiefs, their bare arms and legs, the wide-brimmed straw hats of field-workers, the men's shirts, the white trousers that nearly all of them wore.

The last rays of sunlight fell like a bright dust over the long lines of poplar trees by the channels which divided up the plain into fields of various sizes, and lingered caressingly over the groups of men, women, and children, horses and carts and cattle. The shepherds and herdsmen began to gather their flocks together with the sound of their horns. The plain seemed so silent and so full of sound, a strange antithesis, but only strange to those who do not know the splendours of the fields. Loads of green fodder came into the township from every side. There was something indescribably somnolent in the influence of the scene, and Véronique, between the curé and Gérard, uttered no word.

At last they came to a gap made by a rough track that led from the houses ranged below the terrace to the parsonage house and the church; and looking down into Montégnac, Gérard and M. Bonnet saw the upturned faces of the women, men, and children, all looking at them. Doubtless it was Mme. Graslin more particularly whom they followed with their eyes. And what affection and gratitude there was in their way of doing this! With what blessings did they not greet Véronique's appearance! With what devout intentness they watched the three benefactors of a whole countryside! It was as if man added a hymn of gratitude to all the songs of evening. While Mme. Graslin walked with her eyes set on the magnificent distant expanse of green, her dearest creation, the mayor and the curé watched the groups below. There was no mistake about their expression; grief, melancholy, and regret, mingled with hope, were plainly visible in them all. There was not a soul in Montégnac but knew how that M. Roubaud had gone to Paris to fetch some great doctors, and that the beneficent lady of the canton was nearing the end of a fatal illness. On market days in every place for thirty miles round, the peasants asked the Montégnac folk, 'How is your mistress?' And so, the great thought of

death hovered over this countryside amid the fair picture of the hay fields.

Far off in the plain, more than one mower sharpening his scythe, more than one girl leaning on her rake, or farmer among his stacks of hay, looked up and paused thoughtfully to watch Mme. Graslin, their great lady, the pride of the Corrèze. They tried to discover some hopeful sign, or watched her admiringly, prompted by a feeling which put work out of their minds. 'She is out of doors, so she must be better!' The simple phrase was on all lips.

Mme. Graslin's mother was sitting at the end of the terrace. Véronique had placed a cast-iron garden-seat in the corner, so that she might sit there and look down into the churchyard through the balustrade. Mme. Sauviat watched her daughter as she walked along the terrace, and her eyes filled with tears. She knew something of the preternatural effort which Véronique was making; she knew that even at that moment her daughter was suffering fearful pain, and that it was only a heroic effort of will that enabled her to stand. Tears, almost like tears of blood, found their way down among the sunburned wrinkles of a face like parchment, that seemed as if it could not alter one crease for any emotion any more. Little Graslin, standing between M. Ruffin's knees, cried for sympathy.

'What is the matter, child?' the tutor asked sharply.

'Grandmamma is crying——'

M. Ruffin's eyes had been fixed on Mme. Graslin, who was coming towards them; he looked at Mme. Sauviat; the Roman matron's face, stony with sorrow and wet with tears, gave him a great shock. That dumb grief had invested the old woman with a certain grandeur and sacredness.

'Madame, why did you let her go out?' asked the tutor.

Véronique was coming nearer. She walked like a

queen, with admirable grace in her whole bearing. And Mme. Sauviat knew that she should outlive her daughter, and in the cry of despair that broke from her, a secret escaped that revealed many things which roused curiosity.

'To think of it! She walks and wears a horrible hair shirt always pricking her skin!'

The young man's blood ran cold at her words; he could not be insensible to the exquisite grace of Véronique's movements, and shuddered as he thought of the cruel, unrelenting mastery that the soul must have gained over the body. A Parisienne famed for her graceful figure, the ease of her carriage and bearing, might perhaps have feared comparison with Véronique at that moment.

'She has worn it for thirteen years, ever since the child was weaned,' the old woman said, pointing to young Graslin. 'She has worked miracles here; and if they but knew her life, they might put her among the saints. Nobody has seen her eat since she came here, do you know why? Aline brings her a bit of dry bread three times a day on a great platter full of ashes, and vegetables cooked in water without any salt, on a red earthenware dish that they put a dog's food in! Yes. That is the way she lives who has given life to the canton.—She says her prayers kneeling on the hem of her cilice. She says that if she did not practise these austerities, she could not wear the smiling face you see.—I am telling you this' (and the old woman's voice dropped lower) 'for you to tell it to the doctor that M. Roubaud has gone to fetch from Paris. If he will prevent my daughter from continuing these penances, they might save her yet (who knows?) though the hand of death is on her head. Look! Ah, I must be very strong to have borne all these things for fifteen years.'

The old woman took her grandson's hand, raised it, and passed it over her forehead and cheeks as if some restorative balm communicated itself in the touch of the

little hand ; then she set a kiss upon it, a kiss full of the love which is the secret of grandmothers no less than mothers. By this time Véronique was only a few paces distant, Clousier was with her, and the curé and Gérard. Her face, lit up by the setting sun, was radiant with awful beauty.

One thought, steadfast amid many inward troubles, seemed to be written in the lines that furrowed the sallow forehead in long folds piled one above the other like clouds. The outlines of her face, now completely colourless, entirely white with the dead olive-tinged whiteness of plants grown without sunlight, were thin but not withered, and showed traces of great physical suffering produced by mental anguish. She had quelled the body through the soul, and the soul through the body. So completely worn out was she, that she resembled her past self only as an old woman resembles her portrait painted in girlhood. The glowing expression of her eyes spoke of the absolute domination of a Christian will over a body reduced to the subjection required by religion, for in this woman the flesh was at the mercy of the spirit. As in profane poetry Achilles dragged the dead body of Hector, victoriously she dragged it over the stony ways of life ; and thus for fifteen years she had compassed the heavenly Jerusalem which she hoped to enter, not as a thief, but amid triumphant acclamations. Never was anchorite amid the parched and arid deserts of Africa more master of his senses than Véronique in her splendid château in a rich land of soft and luxuriant landscape, nestling under the mantle of the great forest where science, heir to Moses' rod, had caused plenty to spring forth and the prosperity and the welfare of a whole countryside. Véronique was looking out over the results of twelve years of patience, on the accomplishment of a task on which a man of ability might have prided himself ; but with the gentle modesty which Pontorno's brush depicted in the expres-

sion of his symbolical *Christian Chastity*—with her arms about the unicorn. Her two companions respected her silent mood when they saw that she was gazing over the vast plain, once sterile, and now fertile ; the devout lady of the manor went with folded arms and eyes fixed on the point where the road reached the horizon.

Suddenly she stopped when but two paces away from Mme. Sauviat, who watched her as Christ's mother must have gazed at her Son upon the Cross. Véronique raised her hand and pointed to the spot where the road turned off to Montégnac.

'Do you see that calèche and the four post-horses?' she asked, smiling. 'That is M. Roubaud. He is coming back. We shall soon know now how many hours I have to live.'

'*Hours!*' echoed Gérard.

'Did I not tell you that this was my last walk?' she said. 'Did I not come to see this beautiful view in all its glory for the last time?'

She indicated the fair meadow-land, lit up by the last rays of the sun, and the township below. All the village had come out and stood in the square in front of the church.

'Ah,' she went on, 'let me think that there is God's benediction in the strange atmospheric conditions that have favoured our hay harvest. Storms all about us, rain and hail and thunder have laid waste pitilessly and incessantly, but not here. The people think so; why should not I follow their example? I need so much to find some good augury on earth for that which awaits me when my eyes shall be closed!'

Her child came to her, took his mother's hand, and laid it on his hair. The great eloquence of that movement touched Véronique; with preternatural strength she caught him up, held him on her left arm a moment as she used to hold him as a child at the breast, and kissed him. 'Do you see this land, my boy?' she said. 'You

must go on with your mother's work when you are a man.'

Then the curé spoke sadly: 'There are a very few strong and privileged natures who are permitted to see Death face to face, to fight a long duel with him, and to show courage and skill that strike others with admiration; this is the dreadful spectacle that you give us, madame; but, perhaps, you are somewhat wanting in pity for us. Leave us at least the hope that you are mistaken, that God will permit you to finish all that you have begun.'

'I have done nothing save through you, my friends,' said she. 'It was in my power to be useful to you; it is so no longer. Everything about us is green; there is no desolate waste here now, save my own heart. You know it, dear curé, you know that I can only find peace and pardon *there*——'

She held out her hand over the churchyard. She had never said so much since the day when she first came to Montégnac and fainted away on that very spot. The curé gazed at his penitent; and, accustomed as he had been for long to read her thoughts, he knew from those simple words that he had won a fresh victory. It must have cost Véronique a terrible effort over herself to break a twelve years' silence with such pregnant words; and the curé clasped his hands with the devout fervour familiar to him, and looked with deep religious emotion on the family group about him. All their secrets had passed through his heart.

Gérard looked bewildered; the words 'peace and pardon' seemed to sound strangely in his ears; M. Ruffin's eyes were fixed in a sort of dull amazement on Mme. Graslin. And meanwhile the calèche sped rapidly along the road, threading its way from tree to tree.

'There are five of them!' said the curé, who could see and count the travellers.

'Five!' exclaimed M. Gérard. 'Will five of them know more than two?'

'Ah!' murmured Mme. Graslin, who leant on the curé's arm, 'there is the public prosecutor. What does he come to do here?'

'And papa Grossetête too!' cried Francis.

'Madame, take courage, be worthy of yourself,' said the curé. He drew Mme. Graslin, who was leaning heavily on him, a few paces aside.

'What does he want?' she said for all answer, and she went to lean against the balustrade.—'Mother!'

Mme. Sauviat sprang forward with an activity that belied her years.

'I shall see him again . . .' said Véronique.

'If he is coming with M. Grossetête,' said the curé, 'it can only be with good intentions, of course.'

'Ah! sir, my daughter is dying!' cried Mme. Sauviat, seeing the change that passed over Mme. Graslin's face at the words. 'How will she endure such cruel agitations? M. Grossetête has always prevented that man from coming to see Véronique——'

Véronique's face flamed.

'So you hate him, do you?' the Abbé Bonnet asked, turning to his penitent.

'She left Limoges lest all Limoges should know her secrets,' said Mme. Sauviat, terrified by that sudden change wrought in Mme. Graslin's drawn features.

'Do you not see that his presence will poison the hours that remain to me, when Heaven alone should be in my thoughts? He is nailing me down to earth!' cried Véronique.

The curé took Mme. Graslin's arm once more, and constrained her to walk a few paces; when they were alone, he looked full at her with one of those angelic looks which calm the most violent tumult in the soul.

'If it is thus,' he said, 'I, as your confessor, bid you to receive him, to be kind and gracious to him, to lay aside

this garment of anger, and to forgive him as God will forgive you. Can there be a taint of passion in the soul that I deemed purified? Burn this last grain of incense on the altar of penitence, lest all shall be one lie in you.'

'There was still this last struggle to make, and it is made,' she said, drying her eyes. 'The evil one was lurking in the last recess in my heart, and doubtless it was God who put into M. de Granville's heart the thought that sends him here. How many times will He smite me yet?' she cried.

She stopped as if to put up an inward prayer; then she turned to Mme. Sauviat, and said in a low voice—

'Mother dear, be nice and kind to M. le Procureur général.'

In spite of herself, the old Auvergnate shuddered feverishly.

'There is no hope left,' she said, as she caught at the curé's hand.

As she spoke, the cracking of the postilion's whip announced that the calèche was climbing the avenue; the great gateway stood open, the carriage turned in the courtyard, and in another moment the travellers came out upon the terrace. Beside the public prosecutor and M. Grossetête, the Archbishop had come (M. Dutheil was in Limoges for Gabriel de Rastignac's consecration as Bishop), and M. Roubaud came arm in arm with Horace Bianchon, one of the greatest doctors in Paris.

'You are welcome,' said Véronique, addressing her guests, 'and *you*' (holding out a hand to the public prosecutor and grasping his) 'especially welcome.'

M. Grossetête, the Archbishop, and Mme. Sauviat exchanged glances at this; so great was their astonishment, that it overcame the profound discretion of old age.

'And I thank him who brought you here,' Véronique went on, as she looked on the Comte de Granville's face for the first time in fifteen years. 'I have borne you a grudge for a long time, but now I know that I have done

you an injustice; you shall know the reason of all this if you will stay here in Montégnac for two days.'—She turned to Horace Bianchon—'This gentleman will confirm my apprehensions, no doubt.'—Then to the Archbishop—'It is God surely who sends you to me, my lord,' she said with a bow. 'For our old friendship's sake you will not refuse to be with me in my last moments. By what grace, I wonder, have I all those who have loved me and sustained me all my life about me now?'

At the word 'loved' she turned with graceful, deliberate intent towards M. de Granville; the kindness in her manner brought tears into his eyes. There was a deep silence. The two doctors asked themselves what witchcraft it was that enabled the woman before them to stand upright while enduring the agony which she must suffer. The other three were so shocked at the change that illness had wrought in her that they could only communicate their thoughts by the eyes.

'Permit me to go with these gentlemen,' she said, with her unvarying grace of manner; 'it is an urgent question.' She took leave of her guests, and, leaning upon the two doctors, went towards the château so slowly and painfully that it was evident that the end was at hand.

The Archbishop looked at the curé.

'M. Bonnet,' he said, 'you have worked wonders!'

'Not I, but God, my lord,' answered the other.

'They said that she was dying,' exclaimed M. Grossetête; 'why, she is dead! There is nothing left but a spirit——'

'A soul,' said M. Gérard.

'She is the same as ever,' cried the public prosecutor.

'She is a Stoic after the manner of the old Greek Zeno,' said the tutor.

Silently they went along the terrace and looked out over the landscape that glowed a most glorious red colour in the light shed abroad by the fires of the sunset.

'It is thirteen years since I saw this before,' said the Archbishop, indicating the fertile fields, the valley, and the hill above Montégnac, 'so for me this miracle is as extraordinary as another which I have just witnessed; for how can you let Mme. Graslin stand upright? She ought to be lying in bed——'

'So she was,' said Mme. Sauviat. 'She never left her bed for ten days, but she was determined to get up to see this place for the last time.'

'I understand,' said M. de Granville. 'She wished to say farewell to all that she had called into being, but she ran the risk of dying here on the terrace.'

'M. Roubaud said that she was not to be thwarted,' said Mme. Sauviat.

'What a marvellous thing!' exclaimed the Archbishop, whose eyes never wearied of wandering over the view. 'She has made the waste into sown fields. But we know, monsieur,' he added, turning to Gérard, 'that your skill and your labours have been a great factor in this.'

'We have only been her labourers,' the mayor said. 'Yes; we are only the hands, she was the head.'

Mme. Sauviat left the group, and went to hear what the opinion of the doctor from Paris was.

'We shall stand in need of heroism to be present at this deathbed,' said the public prosecutor, addressing the Archbishop and the curé.

'Yes,' said M. Grossetête; 'but for such a friend, great things should be done.'

While they waited and came and went, oppressed by heavy thoughts, two of Mme. Graslin's tenants came up. They had come, they said, on behalf of a whole township waiting in painful suspense to hear the verdict of the doctor from Paris.

'They are in consultation, we know nothing as yet, my friends,' said the Archbishop.

M. Roubaud came hurrying towards them, and at the

sound of his quick footsteps the others hastened to meet him.

'Well?' asked the mayor.

'She has not forty-eight hours to live,' answered M. Roubaud. 'The disease has developed while I was away. M. Bianchon cannot understand how she could walk. These seldom seen phenomena are always the result of great exaltation of mind.—And so, gentlemen,' he added, speaking to the churchmen, 'she has passed out of our hands and into yours; science is powerless; my illustrious colleague thinks that there is scarcely time for the ceremonies of the Church.'

'Let us put up the prayers appointed for times of great calamity,' said the curé, and he went away with his parishioners. 'His lordship will no doubt condescend to administer the last sacraments.'

The Archbishop bowed his head in reply; he could not say a word, his eyes were full of tears. The group sat down or leant against the balustrade, and each was deep in his own thoughts. The church bells pealed mournfully, the sound of many footsteps came up from below, the whole village was flocking to the service. The light of the altar candles gleamed through the trees in M. Bonnet's garden, and then began the sounds of chanting. A faintly flushed twilight overspread the fields, the birds had ceased to sing, and the only sound in the plain was the shrill, melancholy, long-drawn note of the frogs.

'Let us do our duty,' said the Archbishop at last, and he went slowly towards the house, like a man who carries a burden greater than he can bear.

The consultation had taken place in the great drawing-room, a vast apartment which communicated with a state bedroom, draped with crimson damask. Here Graslin had exhibited to the full the self-made man's taste for display. Véronique had not entered the room half-a-dozen times in fourteen years; the great suite of apartments was completely useless to her; she had never

received visitors in them, but the effort she had made to discharge her last obligations and to quell her revolted physical nature had left her powerless to reach her own rooms.

The great doctor had taken his patient's hand and felt her pulse, then he looked significantly at M. Roubaud, and the two men carried her into the adjoining room and laid her on the bed, Aline hastily flinging open the doors for them. There were, of course, no sheets on the state bed; the two doctors laid Mme. Graslin at full length on the crimson quilt, Roubaud opened the windows, flung back the Venetian shutters, and summoned help. La Sauviat and the servants came hurrying to the room; they lighted the wax candles (yellow with age) in the sconces.

Then the dying woman smiled. 'It is decreed that my death shall be a festival, as a Christian's death should be.'

During the consultation she spoke again—

'The public prosecutor has done his work; I was going; he has despatched me sooner——'

The old mother laid a finger on her lips with a warning glance.

'Mother, I will speak now,' Véronique said in answer. 'Look! the finger of God is in all this; I shall die very soon in this room hung with red . . .'

La Sauviat went out in dismay at the words.

'Aline!' she cried, 'she is speaking out!——'

'Ah! madame's mind is wandering,' said the faithful waiting-woman, coming in with the sheets. 'Send for M. le Curé, madame.'

'You must undress your mistress,' said Bianchon, as soon as Aline entered the room.

'It will be very difficult; madame wears a hair shirt next her skin.'

'What?' the great doctor cried, 'are such horrors still practised in this nineteenth century?'

'Mme. Graslin has never allowed me to touch the stomach,' said M. Roubaud. 'I could learn nothing of her complaint save from her face and her pulse, and from what I could learn from her mother and her maid.'

Véronique was laid on a sofa while they made the great bed ready for her at the further end of the room. The doctors spoke together with lowered voices as La Sauviat and Aline made the bed. There was a look terrible to see in the two women's faces; the same thought was wringing both their hearts. 'We are making her bed for the last time—this will be her bed of death.'

The consultation was brief. In the first place, Bianchon insisted that Aline and La Sauviat must cut the patient out of the cilice and put her in a nightdress. The two doctors waited in the great drawing-room while this was done. Aline came out with the terrible instrument of penance wrapped in a towel. 'Madame is just one wound,' she told them.

'Madame, you have a stronger will than Napoleon had,' said Bianchon, when the two doctors had come in again, and Véronique had given clear answers to the questions put to her. 'You are preserving your faculties in the last stage of a disease in which the Emperor's brilliant intellect sank. From what I know of you, I feel that I owe it to you to tell you the truth.'

'I implore you, with clasped hands, to tell it me,' she said; 'you can measure the strength that remains to me, and I have need of all the life that is in me for a few hours yet.'

'You must think of nothing but your salvation,' said Bianchon.

'If God grants that body and mind die together,' she said, with a divinely sweet smile, 'believe that the favour is vouchsafed for the glory of His Church on earth. My mind is still needed to carry out a thought from God, while Napoleon had accomplished his destiny.'

The two doctors looked at each other in amazement;

the words were spoken as easily as if Mme. Graslin had been in her drawing-room.

'Ah! here is the doctor who will heal me,' she added as the Archbishop entered.

She summoned all her strength to sit upright to take leave of M. Bianchon, speaking graciously, and asking him to accept something beside money for the good news which he had just brought her; then she whispered a few words to her mother, who went out with the doctor. She asked the Archbishop to wait until the curé should come, and seemed to wish to rest for a little while. Aline sat by her mistress's bedside.

At midnight Mme. Graslin woke and asked for the Archbishop and the curé. Aline told her that they were in the room engaged in prayer for her. With a sign she dismissed her mother and the maid, and beckoned the two priests to her bed.

'Nothing of what I shall say is unknown to you, my lord, nor to you, M. le Curé. You, my Lord Archbishop, were the first to look into my conscience; at a glance you read almost the whole past, and that which you saw was enough for you. My confessor, an angel sent by Heaven to be near me, knows something more; I have confessed all to him, as in duty bound. And now I wish to consult you—whose minds are enlightened by the spirit of the Church; I want to ask you how such a woman as I should take leave of this life as a true Christian. You, spirits holy and austere, do you think that if Heaven vouchsafes pardon to the most complete and profound repentance ever made by a guilty soul, I shall have accomplished my whole task here on earth?'

'Yes; yes, my daughter,' said the Archbishop.

'No, my father, no!' she cried, sitting upright, and lightnings flashed from her eyes. 'Yonder lies an unhappy man in his grave, not many steps away, under the sole weight of a hideous crime; here, in this sumptuous house, there is a woman crowned with the aureole of

good deeds and a virtuous life. They bless the woman; they curse him, poor boy. On the criminal they heap execrations, I enjoy the good opinion of all; yet most of the blame of his crime is mine, and a great part of the good for which they praise me so and are grateful to me is his; cheat that I am! I have the credit of it, and he, a martyr to his loyalty to me, is covered with shame. In a few hours I shall die, and a whole canton will weep for me, a whole department will praise my good deeds, my piety, and my virtues; and he died reviled and scorned, a whole town crowding about to see him die, for hate of the murderer! You, my judges, are indulgent to me, but I hear an imperious voice within me that will not let me rest. Ah! God's hand, more heavy than yours, has been laid upon me day by day, as if to warn me that all was not expiated yet. My sin shall be redeemed by public confession. Oh! he was happy, that criminal who went to a shameful death in the face of earth and heaven! But as for me, I cheated justice, and I am still a cheat! All the respect shown to me has been like mockery, not a word of praise but has scorched my heart like fire. And now the public prosecutor has come here. Do you not see that the will of Heaven is in accordance with this voice that cries "Confess"?'

Both priests, the prince of the Church and the simple country parson, the two great luminaries, remained silent, and kept their eyes fixed on the ground. So deeply moved were the judges by the greatness and the submission of the sinner, that they could not pass sentence. After a pause the Archbishop raised his noble face, thin and worn with the daily practice of austerity in a devout life.

'My child,' he said, 'you are going beyond the commandments of the Church. It is the glory of the Church that she adapts her dogmas to the conditions of life in every age; for the Church is destined to make the

pilgrimage of the centuries side by side with humanity. According to the decision of the Church, private confession has replaced public confession. This substitution has made the new rule of life. The sufferings which you have endured suffice. Depart in peace. God has heard you indeed.'

'But is not this wish of a criminal in accordance with the rule of the Early Church, which filled heaven with as many saints and martyrs and confessors as there are stars in heaven?' Véronique cried earnestly. 'Who was it that wrote "Confess your faults one to another"? Was it not one of our Saviour's own immediate disciples? Let me confess my shame publicly upon my knees. That will be an expiation of the wrong that I have done to the world, and to a family exiled and almost extinct through my sin. The world should know that my good deeds are not an offering to God; that they are only the just payment of a debt. . . . Suppose that, when I am gone, some finger should raise the veil of lies that covers me? . . . Oh, the thought of it brings the supreme hour nearer.'

'I see calculation in this, my child,' the Archbishop said gravely. 'There are still strong passions left in you; that which I deemed extinguished is——'

'My lord,' she cried, breaking in upon the speaker, turning her fixed horror-stricken eyes on him, 'I swear to you that my heart is purified so far as it may be in a guilty and repentant woman; there is no thought left in me now but the thought of God.'

'Let us leave Heaven's justice to take its course, my lord,' the curé said, in a softened voice. 'I have opposed this idea for four years. It has caused the only differences of opinion which have arisen between my penitent and me. I have seen the very depths of this soul; earth has no hold left there. When the tears, sighs, and contrition of fifteen years have buried a sin in which two beings shared, do not think that there is the least luxurious

taint in the long and dreadful remorse. For a long while memory has ceased to mingle its flames in the most ardent repentance. Yes, many tears have quenched so great a fire. I will answer,' he said, stretching his hand out above Mme. Graslin's head and raising his tear-filled eyes, 'I will answer for the purity of this archangel's soul. I used once to see in this desire a thought of reparation to an absent family ; it seems as if God Himself has sent one member of it here, through one of those accidents in which His guidance is unmistakably revealed.'

Véronique took the curé's trembling hand, and kissed it.

'You have often been harsh to me, dear pastor,' she said ; 'and now, in this moment, I discover where your apostolic sweetness lay hidden.—You,' she said, turning to the Archbishop, 'you, the supreme head of this corner of God's earthly kingdom, be my stay in this time of humiliation. I shall prostrate myself as the lowest of women ; you will raise me, a forgiven soul, equal, it may be, with those who have never gone astray.'

The Archbishop was silent for a while, engaged, no doubt, in weighing the considerations visible to his eagle's glance.

'My lord,' said the curé, 'deadly blows have been aimed at religion. Will not this return to ancient customs, made necessary by the greatness both of the sin and the repentance, be a triumph which will redound to us ?'

'They will say that we are fanatics ! that we have insisted on this cruel scene !' and the Archbishop fell once more to his meditations.

Just at that moment Horace Bianchon and Roubaud came in without knocking at the door. As it opened, Véronique saw her mother, her son, and all the servants kneeling in prayer. The curés of the two neighbouring parishes had come to assist M. Bonnet ; perhaps also to

pay their respects to the great Archbishop, in whom the Church of France saw a cardinal-designate, hoping that some day the Sacred College might be enlightened by the advent of an intellect so thoroughly Gallican.

Horace Bianchon was about to start for Paris; he came to bid farewell to the dying lady, and to thank her for her munificence. He approached the bed slowly, guessing from the manner of the two priests that the inward wound which had caused the disease of the body was now under consideration. He took Véronique's hand, laid it on the bed, and felt her pulse. The deepest silence, the silence of the fields in a summer night, added solemnity to the scene. Lights shone from the great drawing-room, beyond the folding doors, and fell upon the little company of kneeling figures, the curés only were seated, reading their breviaries. About the crimson bed of state stood the Archbishop in his violet robes, the curé, and the two men of science.

'She is troubled even in death!' said Horace Bianchon. Like many men of great genius, he not seldom found grand words worthy of the scenes at which he was present.

The Archbishop rose, as if goaded by some inward impulse. He called M. Bonnet, and went towards the door. They crossed the chamber and the drawing-room, and went out upon the terrace, where they walked up and down for a few minutes. As they came in after a consideration of this point of ecclesiastical discipline, Roubaud went to meet them.

'M. Bianchon sent me to tell you to be quick; Mme. Graslin is dying in strange agitation, which is not caused by the severe physical pain which she is suffering.'

The Archbishop hurried back, and in reply to Mme. Graslin's anxious eyes, he said, 'You shall be satisfied.'

Bianchon (still with his fingers on the dying woman's wrist) made an involuntary start of surprise; he gave Roubaud a quick look, and then glanced at the priests.

'My lord, this body is no longer our province,' he said; 'your words brought life in the place of death. You make a miracle credible.'

'Madame has been nothing but soul this long time past,' said Roubaud, and Véronique thanked him by a glance.

A smile crossed her face as she lay there, and, with the smile that expressed the gladness of a completed expiation, the innocent look of the girl of eighteen returned to her. The appalling lines traced by inward tumult, the dark colouring, the livid patches, all the details that but lately had contributed a certain dreadful beauty to her face, all alterations of all kinds, in short, had vanished; to those who watched Véronique it seemed as if she had been wearing a mask and had suddenly dropped it. The wonderful transfiguration by which the inward life and nature of this woman was made visible in her features was wrought for the last time. Her whole being was purified and illuminated, her face might have caught a gleam from the flaming swords of the guardian angels about her. She looked once more as she used to look in Limoges when they called her 'the little Virgin.' The love of God manifestly was yet stronger in her than the guilty love had been; the earthly love had brought out all the forces of life in her; the love of God dispelled every trace of the inroads of death. A smothered cry was heard. La Sauviat appeared; she sprang to the bed. 'So I see my child again at last!' she exclaimed.

Something in the old woman's accent as she uttered the two words, 'my child,' conjured up such visions of early childhood and its innocence, that those who watched by this heroic deathbed turned their heads away to hide their emotion. The great doctor took Mme. Graslin's hand, kissed it, and then went his way, and soon the sound of his departing carriage sent echoes over the countryside, spreading the tidings that he had no hope of saving the life of her who was the life of the country.

The Archbishop, curé, and doctor, and all who felt tired, went to take a little rest. Mme. Graslin herself slept for some hours. When she awoke the dawn was breaking; she asked them to open the windows, she would see her last sunrise.

At ten o'clock in the morning the Archbishop, in pontifical vestments, came back to Mme. Graslin's room. Both he and M. Bonnet reposed such confidence in her that they made no recommendations as to the limits to be observed in her confession. Véronique saw other faces of other clergy, for some of the curés from neighbouring parishes had come. The splendid ornaments which Mme. Graslin had presented to her beloved parish church lent splendour to the ceremony. Eight children, choristers in their red-and-white surplices, stood in a double row between the bed and the door of the great drawing-room, each of them holding one of the great candlesticks of gilded bronze which Véronique had ordered from Paris. A white-haired sacristan on either side of the daïs held the banner of the Church and the crucifix. The servants, in their devotion, had removed the wooden altar from the sacristy and erected it near the drawing-room door; it was decked and ready for the Archbishop to say mass. Mme. Graslin was touched by an attention which the Church pays only to crowned heads. The great folding doors that gave access to the dining-room stood wide open, so that she could see the hall of the château filled with people; nearly all the village was there.

Her friends had seen to everything, none but the people of the house stood in the drawing-room; and before them, grouped about the door of her room, she saw her intimate friends and those whose discretion might be trusted. M. Grossetête, M. de Granville, Roubaud, Gérard, Clousier, and Ruffin stood foremost among these. All of them meant to stand upright when the time came, so that the dying woman's confession

should not travel beyond them. Other things favoured this design, for the sobs of those about her drowned her voice.

Two of these stood out dreadfully conspicuous among the rest. The first was Denise Tascheron. In her foreign dress, made with Quakerly simplicity, she was unrecognisable to any of the villagers who might have caught a glimpse of her. Not so for the public prosecutor; she was a figure that he was not likely to forget, and with her reappearance a dreadful light began to dawn on him. Now he had a glimpse of the truth, a suspicion of the part which he had played in Mme. Graslin's life, and then the whole truth flashed upon him. Less overawed than the rest by the religious influence, the child of the nineteenth century, the man of law felt a cruel sensation of dismay; the whole drama of Véronique's inner life in the Hôtel Graslin during Tascheron's trial opened out before him. The whole of that tragic epoch reconstructed itself in his memory, lighted up by La Sauviat's eyes, which gleamed with hate of him not ten paces away; those eyes seemed to direct a double stream of molten lead upon him. The old woman had forgiven him nothing. The impersonation of man's justice felt shudders run through his frame. He stood there heart-stricken and pallid, not daring to turn his eyes to the bed where the woman whom he had loved was lying, livid beneath the shadow of Death's hand, drawing strength from the very magnitude of her offence to quell her agony. Vertigo seized on him as he saw Véronique's shrunken profile, a white outline in sharp relief against the crimson damask.

The mass began at eleven o'clock. When the curé of Vizay had read the epistle, the Archbishop divested himself of his dalmatic, and took up his station in the doorway—

'Christians here assembled to witness the administration of extreme unction to the mistress of this house, you who are uniting your prayers to those of the Church

to make intercession with God for the salvation of her soul, learn that she thinks herself unworthy to receive the holy viaticum until she has made, for the edification of others, a public confession of her greatest sin. We withstood her pious desire, although this act of contrition was long in use in the Church in the earliest Christian times; but as the afflicted woman tells us that the confession touches on the rehabilitation of an unhappy child of this parish, we leave her free to follow the inspirations of repentance.'

After these words, spoken with the benign dignity of a shepherd of souls, the Archbishop turned and gave place to Véronique. The dying woman was seen, supported by her mother and the curé, two great and venerable symbols: did she not owe her double existence to the earthly mother who had borne her, and to the Church, the mother of her soul? Kneeling on a cushion, she clasped her hands and meditated for a moment to gather up and concentrate the strength to speak from some source derived from Heaven. There was something unspeakably awful in that silent pause. No one dared to look at his neighbour. All eyes were fixed on the ground. Yet when Véronique looked up, she met the public prosecutor's glance, and the expression of that white face sent the colour to her own.

'I should not have died in peace,' Véronique began, in a voice unlike her natural tone, 'if I had left behind the false impression which each one of you who hears me speak has possibly formed of me. In me you see a great sinner, who beseeches your prayers, and seeks to merit pardon by the public confession of her sin. So deeply has she sinned, so fatal were the consequences of her guilt, that it may be that no repentance will redeem it. And yet the greater my humiliation on earth, the less, doubtless, have I to dread from God's anger in the heavenly kingdom whither I fain would go.

'It is nearly twenty years since my father, who had

such great belief in me, recommended a son of this parish to my care; he had seen in him a wish to live rightly, aptitude, and an excellent disposition. This young man was the unhappy Jean-François Tascheron, who thenceforward attached himself to me as his benefactress. How was it that my affection for him became a guilty one? That explanation need not, I think, be required of me. Yet perhaps it might be thought that the purest possible motives were imperceptibly transformed by unheard-of self-sacrifice, by human frailty, by a host of causes which might seem to be extenuations of my guilt. But am I the less guilty because our noblest affections were my accomplices? I would rather admit, in spite of the barriers raised by the delicacy natural to our sex between me and the young man whom my father intrusted to me, that I, who by my education and social position might regard myself as his protége's superior, listened, in an evil hour, to the voice of the Tempter. I soon found that my maternal position brought me into contact with him so close that I could not but be sensible of his mute and delicate admiration. He was the first and only creature to appreciate me at my just value. Perhaps, too, I myself was led astray by unworthy considerations. I thought that I could trust to the discretion of a young man who owed everything to me, whom chance had placed so far below me, albeit by birth we were equals. In fact, I found a cloak to screen my conduct in my name for charity and good deeds. Alas! (and this is one of my worst sins) I hid my passion in the shadow of the altar. I made everything conduce to the miserable triumph of a mad passion, the most irreproachable actions, my love for my mother, acts of a devotion that was very real and sincere and through so many errors,—all these things were so many links in a chain that bound me. My poor mother, whom I love so much, who hears me even now, was unwittingly and for a long while my accomplice. When her eyes were

opened, I was too deeply committed to my dangerous way, and she found strength to keep my secret in the depths of her mother's heart. Silence in her has thus become the loftiest of virtues. Love for her daughter overcame the love of God. Ah! now I solemnly relieve her of the load of secrecy which she has carried. She shall end her days with no lie in her eyes and brow. May her motherhood absolve her, may her noble and sacred old age, crowned with virtues, shine forth in all its radiance, now that the link which bound her indirectly to touch such infamy is severed——'

Here Véronique's sobs interrupted her words; Aline made her inhale salts.

'Only one other has hitherto been in this secret, the faithful servant who does me this last service; she has, at least, feigned not to know what she must have known, but she has been in the secret of the austerities by which I have broken this weak flesh. So I ask pardon of the world for having lived a lie, drawn into that lie by the remorseless logic of the world.

'Jean-François Tascheron is not as guilty as men may have thought him. Oh, all you who hear me! I beg of you to remember how young he was, and that his frenzy was caused at least as much by the remorse which seized on *me*, as by the spell of an involuntary attraction. And more, far more, do not forget that it was a sense of honour, if a mistaken sense of honour, which caused the greatest disaster of all. Neither of us could endure that life of continual deceits. He turned from them to my own greatness, and, unhappy that he was, sought to make our fatal love as little of a humiliation as might be to me. So I was the cause of his crime. Driven by necessity, the unhappy man, hitherto only guilty of too great a love for his idol, chose of all evil actions the one most irreparable. I knew nothing of it until the very moment when the deed was done. Even as it was being carried out, God overturned

the whole fabric of crooked designs. I heard cries that ring even yet in my ears, and went into the house again. I knew that it was a struggle for life and death, and that I, the object of this mad endeavour, was powerless to interfere. For Tascheron was mad; I bear witness that he was mad! . . .'

Here Véronique looked at the public prosecutor, and a deep audible sigh came from Denise.

'He lost his head when he saw his happiness (so he believed it to be) destroyed by unforeseen circumstances. Love led him astray, then fate dragged him from a misdemeanour to a crime, and from a crime to a double murder. At any rate, when he left my mother's house he was an innocent man; when he returned, he was a murderer. I, and I only in the world, knew that the crime was not premeditated, nor accompanied by the aggravating circumstances which brought the sentence of death on him. A hundred times I determined to give myself up to save him, and a hundred times a terrible but necessary heroism outweighed all other considerations, and the words died on my lips. Surely my presence a few steps away must have contributed to give him the hateful, base, cowardly courage of a murderer. If he had been alone, he would have fled. . . . It was I who had formed his nature, who had given him loftier thoughts and a greater heart; I knew him; he was incapable of anything cowardly or base. Do justice to the innocent hand, do justice to him! God in His mercy lets him sleep in the grave that you, guessing, doubtless, the real truth, have watered with your tears! Punish and curse the guilty thing here before you!—When once the deed was done, I was horror-struck; I did all that I could to hide it. My father had left a charge to me, a childless woman; I was to bring one child of God's family to God, and I brought him to the scaffold. . . . Oh, heap all your reproaches upon me! The hour has come!'

Her eyes glittered with fierce pride as she spoke.

The Archbishop, standing behind her, with his pastoral cross held out above her head, no longer maintained his impassive attitude; he covered his eyes with his right hand. A smothered sound like a dying groan broke the silence, and two men—Gérard and Roubaud—caught Denise Tascheron in their arms. She had swooned away. The fire died down in Véronique's eyes; she looked troubled, but the martyr's serenity soon returned to her face.

'I deserve no praise, no blessings for my conduct here, as you know now,' she said. 'In the sight of Heaven I have led a life full of sharp penance, hidden from all other eyes, and Heaven will value it at its just worth. My outward life has been a vast reparation of the evil that I have wrought; I have engraved my repentance in characters ineffaceable upon this wide land, a record that will last for ever. It is written everywhere in the fields grown green, in the growing township, in the mountain streams turned from their courses into the plain, once wild and barren, now fertile and productive. Not a tree shall be felled here for a century but the peasants will tell the tale of the remorse to which they owe its shade. In these ways the repentant spirit which should have inspired a long and useful life will still make its influence felt among you for a long time to come. All that you should have owed to *his* talents and a fortune honourably acquired has been done for you by the executrix of his repentance, by her who caused his crime. All the wrong done socially has been repaired; I have taken upon myself the work of a life cut short in its flower, the life intrusted to my guidance, the life for which I must shortly give an account——'

Here once more the burning eyes were quenched in tears. She paused.

'There is one among those present,' she continued, 'whom I have hated with a hate which I thought must be eternal, simply because he did no more than his duty.

He was the first instrument of my punishment. I was too close to the deed, my feet were dipped too deep in blood, I was bound to hate justice. I knew that there was a trace of evil passion in my heart so long as that spark of anger should trouble it; I have had nothing to forgive, I have simply purged the corner where the Evil One lurked. Whatever the victory cost, it is complete.'

The public prosecutor turned a tear-stained face to Véronique. It was as if man's justice was remorseful in him. Véronique, turning her face away to continue her story, met the eyes of an old friend; Grossetête, bathed in tears, stretched out his hands entreatingly towards her. 'It is enough!' he seemed to say. The heroic woman heard such a chorus of sobs about her, received so much sympathy, that she broke down; the balm of the general forgiveness was too much, weakness overcame her. Seeing that the sources of her daughter's strength were exhausted, the old mother seemed to find in herself the vigour of a young woman; she held out her arms to carry Véronique.

'Christians,' said the Archbishop, 'you have heard the penitent's confession; it confirms the decree of man's justice; it may lay all scruples and anxiety on that score to rest. In this confession you should find new reasons for uniting your prayers to those of the Church, which offers to God the holy sacrifice of the mass to implore His mercy for the sinner after so grand a repentance.'

The office was finished. Véronique followed all that was said with an expression of such inward peace that she no longer seemed to be the same woman. Her face wore a look of frank innocence, such as it might have worn in the days when, a pure and ingenuous girl, she dwelt under her father's roof. Her brows grew white in the dawn of eternity, her face glowed golden in the light of Heaven. Doubtless she caught something of its mystic harmonies; and in her longing to be made one with God on earth for the last time, she exerted all her

powers of vitality to live. M. Bonnet came to the bedside and gave her absolution; the Archbishop anointed her with the holy oil, with a fatherly tenderness that revealed to those who stood about how dear he held this sheep that had been lost and was found. With that holy anointing the eyes that had wrought such mischief on earth were closed to the things of earth, the seal of the Church was set on those too eloquent lips, and the ears that had listened to the inspirations of evil were closed for ever. All the senses, mortified by penitence, were thus sanctified; the spirit of evil could have no power over this soul.

Never had all the grandeur and deep meaning of a sacrament been apprehended more thoroughly than by those who saw the Church's care thus justified by the dying woman's confession. After that preparation, Véronique received the Body of Christ with a look of hope and joy that melted the icy barrier of unbelief at which the curé had so often knocked in vain. Roubaud, confounded, became a Catholic from that moment.

Awful as the scene was, it was no less touching; and in its solemnity, as of the culminating-point of a drama, it might have given some painter the subject of a masterpiece. When the mournful episode was over, and the words of the Gospel of St. John fell on the ears of the dying woman, she beckoned to her mother to bring Francis back again. (The tutor had taken the boy out of the room.) When Francis knelt on the step by the bedside, the mother whose sins had been forgiven felt free to lay her hands in blessing on his head, and so she drew her last breath, La Sauviat standing at the post she had filled for twenty years, faithful to the end. It was she, a heroine after her manner, who closed the eyes of the daughter who had suffered so much, and laid a kiss on them.

Then all the priests and assistants came round the bed, and intoned the dread chant *De profundis* by the

light of the flaming torches; and from those sounds the people of the whole countryside kneeling without, together with the friends and all the servants praying in the hall, knew that the mother of the canton had passed away. Groans and sobs mingled with the chanting. The noble woman's confession had not passed beyond the threshold of the drawing-room; it had reached none but friendly ears. When the peasants came from Montégnac, and all the district round about came in, each with a green spray, to bid their benefactress a supreme farewell mingled with tears and prayers, they saw a representative of man's justice, bowed down with anguish, holding the cold hand of the woman to whom all unwittingly he had meted out such a cruel but just punishment.

Two days later, and the public prosecutor, with Grossetête, the Archbishop, and the mayor, bore the pall when Mme. Graslin was carried to her last resting-place. Amid deep silence they laid her in the grave; no one uttered a word, for no one had the heart to speak, and all eyes were full of tears.

'She is a saint!' Everywhere the words were repeated along the roads which she had made, in the canton which owed its prosperity to her. It was as if the words were sown abroad across her fields to quicken the life in them. It struck nobody as a strange thing that Mme. Graslin should be buried beside Jean-François Tascheron. She had not asked this; but a trace of pitying tenderness in the old mother prompted her to bid the sacristan put those together whom earth had separated by a violent death, whom one repentance should unite in Purgatory.

Mme. Graslin's will fulfilled all expectations. She founded scholarships in the school at Limoges, and beds in the hospital, intended for the working classes only. A considerable sum (three hundred thousand francs in a period of six years) was left to purchase that part of the village called 'Tascheron's,' and for building an alms-

house there. It was to serve as an asylum for the sick and aged poor of the district, a lying-in hospital for destitute women, and a home for foundling children, and was to be known by the name of Tascheron's Almshouse. Véronique directed that it was to be placed in the charge of the Franciscan Sisters, and fixed the salary of the head physician and house-surgeon at four thousand francs. Mme. Graslin begged Roubaud to be the first head physician, and to superintend the execution of the sanitary arrangements and plans to be made by the architect, M. Gérard. She also endowed the commune of Montégnac with sufficient land to pay the taxes. A certain fund was put in the hands of the Church to be used as determined in some exceptional cases; for the Church was to be the guardian of the young; and if any of the children in Montégnac should show a special aptitude for art or science or industrial pursuits, the far-sighted benevolence of the testatrix provided thus for their encouragement.

The tidings of her death were received as the news of a calamity to the whole country, and no word that reflected on her memory went with it. This silence was the homage paid to her virtues by a devoutly Catholic and hardworking population, which is about to repeat the miracles of the *Lettres édifiantes* in this corner of France.

Gérard, appointed Francis Graslin's guardian, was required by the terms of the will to live at the château, and thither he went; but not until three months after Véronique's death did he marry Denise Tascheron, in whom Francis found, as it were, a second mother.

PART II

THE RISE AND FALL OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

PREFACE

Few books of Balzac's have been the subject of more diverse judgment than *César Birotteau.* From the opinion of the unnamed solicitor, who told Madame Serville that it was an invaluable work to consult on bankruptcy, to that of M. Paul Lacroix (beloved of many as the Bibliophile Jacob), that it might be forgiven for the sake of *Le Père Goriot* and the *Peau de Chagrin*, there is not perhaps quite so great a distance as may appear; but other expressions, opposed not merely in form, but in fact, might probably be collected.

As for the unfavourable division of these opinions there is no difficulty in discovering their causes; and there should be little, save in the case of blind partisans, in acknowledging their partial validity. Although the book opens with one of Balzac's most brilliant pieces of actual human observation—the description of the vague and half-delirious terror of waking from a bad dream,—and though the subsequent conversation between César and Constance has the merit of no vulgar curtain-lecture, it soon goes off into one of those endless retrospective narrations which are among the greatest blots on the *Comédie*, which utterly stop the action, and which, in the case of very many readers who are not gifted with the faculty of what

may be called literary mountaineering, are very likely to cause the putting down of the book. To this initial difficulty has to be added the choking of the latter part with those bankruptcy details which did so charm the professional mind of Laure Balzac's learned friend, and which, for unprofessional minds, have something which is very much the reverse of charm. The reader of only moderate athletic powers, who has with difficulty struggled through and up the sloughs and slopes of the previous history of the Birotteau business, is hardly to be blamed if he gives up the attempt in despair after some attempt on the slippery 'screes' of commercial law which Balzac has delighted to strew over the higher ground.

Complaints of these drawbacks, I repeat, would be, and are, just. Nevertheless, though the list of the faults of the book is not even yet exhausted, it will be a very great pity if any one is baffled by them and fails to go through to the end. For *César Birotteau* is a book than which none of Balzac's is more thoroughly *vécu*, as his countrymen say, more thoroughly inspired with the personal sympathies and experiences of the author; and this with Balzac was always a guarantee of success. He too knew bankruptcy well, and not merely by his studies in the lawyer's office; for though I believe he never actually 'passed the court' (even his printing and publishing operations, disastrous as they were, terminated in arrangements), he was face to face with it all his life. He, too, knew the attraction, the fatal attraction of *une bonne affaire*, such as he speaks of in one of his letters—*une bonne affaire qui ne demande que cent mille francs*. He was perfectly capable of buying up all the nuts in Paris

in order to make hair-oil of them; I should not be at all surprised if he had actually had in view this very speculation. And he thought he knew the ways of bankers and folk of that kind; though whether he did or not, the sons of Zeruiah were usually as much too hard for him as they were for Birotteau. Hence there is even in the dryest details, even in the most long-winded *reportage* of the book, the throb of personal interest, the pulse and pant of life.

The action and characters also are interesting, if not, on the whole, quite artistically probable. It will be observed that the hero does a little underlie the constant objection of the Devil's Advocate to Balzac, that almost every one of his good characters is more or less of a fool. Even a keen man of business *may*, of course, be easily outwitted in a game of pure speculation—a proposition which we need not go to France, or examine the long list of 'crashes' from the fictitious *terrains de la Madeleine* to the real Panama, in order to establish. And a very keen man of business may be imprudently expensive in a combined fit of personal vanity and affection for his family. But it is a little of a stretch on the credulity of the reader to represent a plodding tradesman like Birotteau, who, as we are expressly told, had an old-fashioned horror of 'paper,' as not merely incurring large speculative obligations, but as stripping himself of every rap of ready money while exposing himself to an unusual demand for it. The picture of his going a-borrowing and a-sorrowing is drawn with great power and with much vivacity; but here, too, his simplicity is a thought exaggerated. And Constance's affection for, and fidelity to, an unattractive man, whom she saw to be

little better than a fool, may be thought improbable in an ideal beauty with a clear head, while some may even say that ideal beauties are almost always extremely stupid. Yet, again, in Césarine, Momus may point to that superficiality and vagueness which usually, if not always, mar Balzac's treatment of an 'honest' girl.

Yet these things will not, any more than those formerly mentioned, make any fair or genial judge give up the book to a lower class than that of Balzac's best, if not of his very best. Whatever faults Birotteau may have, his goodness and his probity and, let us add (though it be a little illegitimate), his tragic end, make him one of the author's most sympathetic personages, as are also his wife and daughter. If Popinot is rather the virtuous apprentice of the stage, and Du Tillet the wicked ditto, who is *not* punished, the former at least is attractive; and Pillerault, the good uncle, certainly cannot be accused of foolishness. All the minor figures come in well for the action whenever Balzac will let them act, and not be talking himself; and even the bankruptcy affair acquires a sort of interest from the rapidity and bustle of its conduct. As for the ball—that famous and elaborate instance of the penalties and disappointments of elaborately engineered and anticipated pleasure—it is excellent. Nor should we close without special commendation for Claparon, a less laboured personage than some of the author's, but a very happy sketch of rascality which is not exactly scoundrelism, because, though entirely unscrupulous, it is not in the least malign.

The book was originally published after a fashion not uncommon in France, but, I think, hardly, if at all, known in England, with no publisher's name, and not for sale,

but as a bonus jointly given by the *Figaro* and the *Estafette* to their subscribers for 1838. It bore that date, but was actually issued in November 1837. In this form it had two volumes, three parts (the present two, and a third, *Le Triomphe de César*), and sixteen chapters with headings. Republished by Charpentier in 1839, it lost the chapter-, but kept the part-headings, the last being omitted when it became a *Scène de la Vie Parisienne* in the general arrangement of the *Comédie* (1844).

G. S.

Note.—I hope it is not improper to bespeak unusual indulgence for the translator in regard to the technicalities of this book. She has, I know, taken the greatest pains with them. But to secure absolute success in such a matter we must have an expert in French bankruptcy law who is also an expert in English bankruptcy law, and perfect in both literatures as well. One might go far before finding such a person.

THE RISE AND FALL OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

Retail Perfumer,
Deputy-Mayor of the Second Arrondissement, Paris,
Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, etc.

To Monsieur Alphonse de Lamartine, from his admirer,
De Balzac.

I.

CÉSAR'S APOGEE

THERE is but one brief interval of silence during a winter night in the Rue Saint-Honoré; for to the sounds of carriages rolling home from balls and theatres succeeds the rumbling of market gardeners' carts on their way to the Great Market. During this pause in the great symphony of uproar sent up by the streets of Paris, this cessation of traffic towards one o'clock in the morning, the wife of M. César Birotteau, of the retail perfumery establishment near the Place Vendôme, dreamed a frightful dream, and awoke with a start.

She had met her double. She had appeared to herself, clad in rags, laying a meagre, shrivelled hand on her own shop-door handle. She had been at once in her chair at the cash desk and on the threshold; she had heard herself begging; she had heard two selves speaking in fact, the one from the desk, the other from the doorstep. She turned and stretched out her hand for her husband,

and found his place cold. At that her terror grew to such a pitch that she could not move her head, her neck seemed stiffened to stone, the walls of her throat were glued together, her voice failed her ; she sat up rigid and motionless, staring before her with wide eyes. Her hair rose with a painful sensation, strange sounds rang in her ears, something clutched at her heart though it beat hard, she was covered with perspiration, and yet shuddering with cold in the alcove behind the two open folding doors.

Fear, with its partially morbific effects, is an emotion which puts so violent a strain upon the human mechanism, that the mental faculties are either suddenly stimulated by it to the highest degree of activity, or reduced to the last extremity of disorganisation. Physiology has long been puzzled to account for a phenomenon which upsets its theories and stultifies its hypotheses, although it is simply and solely a shock brought about spontaneously, but, like all electrical phenomena, erratic and unaccountable in its manifestations. This explanation will become a commonplace when men of science will recognise the great part played by electricity in human thinking power.

Mme. Birotteau was just then enduring the pangs which bring about a certain mental lucidity consequent on those terrible discharges when the will is contracted or expanded by a mysterious mechanism. So that, during a lapse of time, exceedingly short if measured by the tickings of a clock, but incommensurable by reason of the infinite rapid impressions which it brought, the poor woman had the prodigious power of uttering more thoughts and of calling up more memories than would have arisen in her mind in its normal state in the course of a whole day. Her soliloquy during this vivid and painful experience may be resumed in a few words she uttered, incongruous and nonsensical as they were—

'There is no reason whatever why Birotteau should be out of bed.—He ate so much veal ; perhaps it dis-

agreed with him.—But if he had been taken ill, he would have waked me up.—These nineteen years that we have slept here together under this roof, he has never got up in the middle of the night without telling me, poor dear!—He has never slept out except when he was on guard.—Did he go to bed when I did? Why, yes. Dear me! how stupid I am!'

She glanced over the bed. There lay her husband's nightcap, moulded to the almost conical shape of his head.

'Can he be dead?—Can he have made away with himself?—Why should he?' she thought. 'Since they made him deputy-mayor two years ago, I haven't known what to make of him.—To get mixed up with public affairs, on the word of an honest woman, isn't it enough to make you feel sorry for a man?—The business is doing well.—He has just given me a shawl.—Perhaps it is doing badly!—Pshaw! I should know of it if it were.—But is there any knowing what is in the bottom of a man's mind? Or a woman's either? There is no harm in that.—Haven't sales amounted to five thousand francs this very day!—And then a deputy-mayor is not likely to kill himself; he knows the law too well for that.—But where can he be?'

She had no power to turn her head; she could not stretch out a hand to the bell-rope, which would have set in motion a general servant, three shopmen, and the errand boy. The nightmare that lasted on into her waking moments was so strong upon her that she forgot her daughter, peacefully sleeping in the next room, beyond the door which opened at the foot of the bed.

'Birotteau!' She received no answer. She fancied that she had called aloud, but, as a matter of fact, she had only spoken in her thoughts.

'Suppose he should have a mistress? But he has not wit enough for that,' she thought, 'and then he is too

fond of me.—Didn't he tell Mme. Roguin that he had never been unfaithful to me, even in thought?—Why, the man is honesty itself!—If any one deserves to go to heaven, he does.—What he finds to say to his confessor, I don't know. He tells him make-believes.—For a Royalist as he is (without any reason to give for it, by the by), he does not make much of a puff of his religion. —Poor dear, he slips out to mass at eight o'clock as if he were running off to amuse himself on the sly. It is the fear of God that he has before his eyes; he does not trouble himself much about hell. How should he have a mistress? He keeps so close to my apron-strings that I get tired of it. He loves me like the apple of his eye; he would put out his eyes for me.—All these nineteen years he has never spoken a harsh word to myself.—I come before his daughter with him.—Why, Césarine is there . . . (Césarine! Césarine!)—Birotteau never has a thought that he does not tell me.—It was a true word he said when he came to the sign of the *Little Sailor* and told me that it would take time to know him. And he's gone! . . . that is the extraordinary thing!'

She turned her head with an effort, and peered into the darkness. Night filled the room with picturesque effects, the despair of language, the exclusive province of the painter of genre. What words could reproduce the whimsical shapes that the curtains took as the draught swelled them, or the startling zigzag shadows that they cast? The dim night-light flickered over the red cotton folds; the brass rosette of the curtain-rest reflected the crimson gleams from a central boss, bloodshot like a robber's eye; a ghostly gown was kneeling there; the room was filled, in fact, with all the strange, unfamiliar appearances which appal the imagination at a time when it can only see horrors and exaggerate them.

Mme. Birotteau fancied that she saw a bright light in the next room, and a thought of fire flashed across her; but she caught sight of a red bandanna handkerchief,

which looked to her like a pool of blood, and in another moment she discovered traces of a struggle in the arrangement of the furniture, and could think of nothing but burglars. She remembered that there was a sum of money in the safe, and a generous fear extinguished the cold ague of nightmare. Thoroughly alarmed, she sprang out on to the floor in her night-dress, to go to the assistance of the husband whom she fancied as engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with assassins.

'Birotteau! Birotteau!' she cried in a voice of anguish.

The retail perfumer was standing in the middle of the adjacent room, apparently engaged in measuring the air with a yard-stick. His dressing-gown (of green cotton, with chocolate-coloured spots) covered him so ill that his bare legs were red with the cold, but he did not seem to notice this.

When César turned round with a 'Well, what is it, Constance?' he looked as a man absorbed by his schemes is apt to look—so ludicrously foolish, that Mme. Birotteau began to laugh.

'Dear me, César, how queer you look!' said she. 'What made you leave me alone without saying anything? I nearly died of fright. I did not know what to think. What are you after, open to every wind that blows? You will catch your death of cold. Birotteau! do you hear?'

'Yes, wife; here I am,' and the perfumer returned to the bedroom.

'There, come along and warm yourself, and tell me what crotchet you have in your head,' returned Mme. Birotteau, raking among the ashes, which she hastily tried to rekindle. 'I am frozen. How stupid it was of me to get up in my night-dress! But I really thought you were being murdered.'

The merchant set down the bedroom candlestick on the chimney-piece, huddled himself in his dressing-gown,

and looked about in an absent fashion for his wife's flannel petticoat.

'Here, pussie, just put this on,' said he. 'Twenty-two by eighteen——' he added, continuing his soliloquy. 'We could have a magnificent drawing-room.'

'Look here! Birotteau, you seem to be in a fair way to lose your wits. Are you dreaming?'

'No; I am thinking, wife.'

'Then you might wait; your follies will keep till daylight at any rate,' cried she, and, fastening her petticoat under her sleeping jacket, she went to open the door of their daughter's room.

'Césarine is fast asleep. She will not hear a word. Come, Birotteau, tell me about it. What is it?'

'We can give the ball.'

'Give a ball! *We* give a ball! My dear! on the word of an honest woman, you are dreaming!'

'Dreaming? not a bit of it, darling.

'Listen; you should always do your duty according to your station in life. Now the Government has brought me into prominence, I belong to the Government, and it is incumbent upon us to study its spirit and to forward its aims by developing them. The Duc de Richelieu has just put an end to the occupation of the Allied troops. According to M. de la Billardière, official functionaries who represent the city of Paris ought to regard it as a duty—each in his own sphere of influence—to celebrate the liberation of French soil. Let us establish beyond proof a genuine patriotism which shall put those accursed schemers that call themselves Liberals to the blush, eh? Do you think that I do not love my country? I mean to show the Liberals and my enemies that to love the King is to love France!'

'Then do you think that you have enemies, my poor Birotteau?'

'Why, yes, we have enemies, wife. And half our friends in the quarter are among them. They all

say, "Birotteau has such luck ; Birotteau was once a nobody, and look at him now ! He is deputy-mayor ; everything has prospered with him." Very well ; there is a nice disappointment still in store for them. You shall be the first to hear that I am a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour ; the King signed the patent yesterday !'

'Oh ! well then, dear, we must give the ball,' cried Mme. Birotteau, greatly excited. 'But what can you have done so great as to have the Cross ?'

Birotteau was embarrassed.

'When M. de la Billardière told me about it yesterday,' said he, 'I asked myself, just as you did, what claim I had to it. But, after thinking it over, I saw that I deserved it, and ended by approving the action of the Government. To begin with, I am a Royalist, and I was wounded at Saint-Roch in Vendémiaire ; it is something, isn't it, to have borne arms for the good cause in those times ? Then some of the merchants think that the way I discharged my duties as arbitrator at the Consular Tribunal had given general satisfaction ; and lastly, I am a deputy-mayor, and the King is distributing four Crosses among the municipal authorities in the city of Paris. After they had gone into the claims of the deputy-mayors for a decoration, the Prefect put me down at the top of the list. The King, too, is sure to know my name ; thanks to old Ragon, I supply him with the only hair powder he will use ; no one else has the recipe for the powder the late Queen used to wear, poor dear august victim ! The Mayor backed me up with all his might. What was I to do ? If the King gives me the Cross when I don't ask him for it, it looks to me as if I could not decline it without failing in respect. Was it my doing that I was made a deputy-mayor ? So as we have the wind in our sails, wife, as your uncle Pillerault says when he is in a joking humour, I have made up my mind that we must live up to our high position. If I am to be somebody, I will have a

try at being whatever Providence meant me to be; a sub-prefect, if such is my destiny. And you make a great mistake, wife, when you imagine that a citizen has discharged all the duty he owes his country when he has supplied his customers with scent across the counter for a score of years. If the State demands the co-operation of our intelligence, we are as much bound to give it, as to pay succession duty, or the door and window tax, *et cetera*. Do you want to sit at your desk all your life? You have been there a pretty long time (God be thanked). The ball will be a private fête of our own. No more of the shop; for *you*, that is. I shall burn the signboard *The Queen of Roses*, and the words, CÉSAR BIROTTEAU (LATE RAGON), RETAIL PERFUMER, shall be painted out on the shop-front. I shall simply put up PERFUMERY in big gold letters instead. There will be room on the mezzanine floor for a cash desk and the safe, and a nice little room for you. I shall make the back-shop and the present dining-room and kitchen into a warehouse. Then I mean to take the first floor next door, and make a way into it through the wall. The staircase must be altered so that we can walk on the level out of one house and into the other. We shall have a fine set of rooms then, furnished up to the nines.

'Yes. I will have your room done up, and contrive a boudoir for you, and Césarine shall have a pretty room. You must engage a young lady for the shop, and she and the assistant and your waiting-maid (yes, madame, you shall have a waiting-maid) shall have rooms on the second floor. The kitchen must be on the third floor. The cook and the errand-boy shall be lodged up there, and we will keep the stock of bottles, and flasks and china on the fourth. The workrooms can be in the attics, so when people come in they will not see bottles being filled and stoppered and labelled, nor sachets being made. That sort of thing is all very well for the Rue Saint-Denis, but it won't do in the Rue Saint-Honoré! Bad

style. Our shop ought to be as snug as a drawing-room. Just tell me this : are we the only perfumers who have come in for honours ? Aren't there vinegar makers and mustard manufacturers who have a command in the National Guard, and are well looked on at the Tuileries ? Let us do as they do, and extend the business, at the same time making our way in society.'

'One moment, Birotteau. Do you know what I think while I hear you talk ? Well, to me, it is just as if a man was starting out on a wild-goose chase. Don't you remenber what I told you when there was talk of your being made mayor ? A quiet life before all things, I said ; you are about as fit for public life as my arm for a windmill sail. Grand doings will be the ruin of you.

'You did not listen to me ; and here the ruin has come upon us. If you are going to take part in politics, you must have money ; and have we money ? What ! you mean to burn the signboard that cost six hundred francs, and give up the *Queen of Roses* and your real glory ? Leave ambition to other people. If you put your hand in the fire, you get singed, don't you ? Politics are very hot nowadays. We have a hundred thousand francs good money invested outside the business, the stock, and the factory, have we ? If you have a mind to increase it, do now as you did in 1793. The funds are at seventy-two, buy *rentes* ; you would have ten thousand livres a year coming in without drawing anything out of the business. Then take advantage of the transfer to marry our Césarine, sell the business, and let us go and live in your part of the world. Why, any time for these fifteen years you have talked of buying the Treasury Farm, that nice little place near Chinon, with streams, and meadows, and woods, and vineyards, and crofts. It would bring you in a thousand crowns a year, and we both of us like the house. It is still to be had for sixty thousand crowns, and my gentleman must meddle and make in politics, must he ?

'Just remember what we are—we are perfumers. Sixteen years ago, before you thought of the Superfine Pâte des Sultanes and the Carminative Toilet Lotion, if any one had come and said to you, "You will have money enough to buy the Treasury Farm," wouldn't you have been wild with joy? Very well; and now, when you can buy the property which you wanted so much that you talked of nothing else every time that you opened your mouth, you begin to talk of squandering the money that we have earned by the sweat of our brows, *ours* I may say, for all along I have sat there at the desk like a dog in a kennel. Now, instead of turning five halfpence into six farthings, and six farthings into nothing at all, wouldn't it be better to have a daughter married to a notary in Paris, and a house that you can stay at, and to spend eight months in the year at Chinon?

'Wait till the funds rise. You can give your daughter eight thousand livres a year; we will keep two thousand for ourselves, and the sale of the business will pay for the Treasury Farm. We will take the furniture down into the country, dear, it is quite worth while, and there we can live like princes, while here one must have at least a million to cut a figure.

'That is just what I expected,' said César Birotteau. 'Oh! you think I am very foolish, no doubt, but I am not so foolish but that I have looked at the thing all round. Attend to what I am going to say. Alexandre Crottat is a son-in-law that would suit us to a T, and he will have Roguin's practice; but do you imagine that he would be satisfied with a hundred thousand francs? (always supposing that we pay down all our ready money when we marry our daughter; and I am of that way of thinking, for I would have nothing but dry bread for the rest of my days to see her as happy as a queen and the wife of a Paris notary, as you say.) Very well, but a hundred thousand francs down, or even eight thousand

francs of *rentes*, would go no way towards buying Roguin's practice.

'Young Xandrot (as we call him) thinks, like everybody else, that we are a great deal richer than we are. If that father of his, a rich farmer who sticks to his property like a leech, does not sell something like a hundred thousand francs worth of land, Xandrot will not be a notary, for Roguin's practice is worth four or five hundred thousand francs. If Crottat does not pay half the money down, how will he manage the business? Césarine ought to have a portion of two hundred thousand francs, and we should retire like decent citizens of Paris on fifteen thousand livres a year in the funds; that is what I should like. If I could make you see all this as clear as daylight, you would have nothing left to say for yourself, eh?'

'Oh! if you have the wealth of the Indies——'

'So I have, darling. Yes,' he put his arm round his wife's waist, and tapped her gently with his fingers, impelled by the joy that shone from every feature of his face. 'I did not want to say a word about this to you till the thing was ripe, but, faith! to-morrow perhaps it will be settled. This is it.

'Roguin has been proposing a business speculation to me, so safe that he and one or two of his clients, and Ragon, and your uncle Pillerault, are going into it. We are to buy some building land near the Madeleine. Roguin thinks that we can buy it now for a quarter of the price it will fetch in three years' time when the leases will be out, and we shall be free to exploit it. There are six of us; each agrees to take so much; I am finding three hundred thousand francs for the purchase of three-eighths. If any of us are short of money, Roguin will advance it, taking a mortgage on the share of the land as security. Pillerault, old Ragon, and I are going to take half of it among us; but I want to have it registered in my name, so as to keep hold of the

handle of the pan and see how the fish are frying. Roguin himself, under the name of M. Charles Claparon, will be joint-owner with me; he will give a guarantee to each of his partners, and I shall do the same with mine. The deeds of purchase will be private deeds until we have all the land in our hands. Roguin will look into it, and see which of the purchases must be completed, for he is not sure that we can dispense with intermediary registration, and yet transfer a separate title to the buyers when we break up the estate into separate lots; but it would take too long to explain it to you.

'When the building land has been paid for, we shall have nothing to do but fold our arms, and in three years' time we shall have a million. Césarine will be twenty years old, we shall have sold the business, and then, God willing, we will go modestly towards greatness.'

'Well, but where are the three hundred thousand francs to come from?' asked Mme. Birotteau.

'My dear little woman, you know nothing of business. There are the hundred thousand francs in Roguin's hands; I will pay them down. Then I shall borrow forty thousand francs on the buildings and the land that our factory stands on, over in the Faubourg du Temple, and we have twenty thousand francs in bills and acceptances in the portfolio—altogether that makes a hundred and sixty thousand francs. There remain a hundred and forty thousand francs to be raised; I will draw bills to the order of M. Charles Claparon the banker; he will advance the money, less the discount. And there are our three hundred thousand francs: and you don't owe an account until it is due. When the bills fall due, we shall be ready for them, with the profits of the business. If we should find any difficulty in meeting them, Roguin would lend me the money at five per cent. on a mortgage on my share of the building land. But there is no need to borrow. I have discovered a specific for making the hair grow, a Comagen oil. Livingston has

put up a hydraulic press for me down yonder for the hazel-nuts ; all the oil should be squeezed out at once under such strong pressure. In a year's time the probabilities are that I shall have made a hundred thousand francs at least. I am thinking about a placard with *Down with Wigs !* for a heading. It would make a prodigious sensation. *You* don't notice how I lie awake. These three months past Macassar Oil has not let me sleep. I mean to do for Macassar !'

'So these are the fine plans that have been running in your head for a couple of months, and not a word to me about them. And I have just seen myself begging at my own door ; what a warning from Heaven ! There will be nothing left to us after a while except our eyes to cry with over our troubles. Never shall you do it so long as I am alive ; do you hear, César ? There is some underhand work somewhere that you do not see ; you are so straightforward and honest that you don't suspect others of cheating. What makes them come to offer you millions ? You are giving bills ; you are going beyond your means ; and how if the Oil does not take ? Suppose that the money does not come in,—suppose that you do not sell the building lots, how are you going to meet the bills ? With the hazel-nut shells ? You want to rise in the world ; you don't intend to have your name over your own shop-door any longer ; you mean to take down the sign—the *Queen of Roses*—and yet you are making up rigmaroles of prospectuses and placards, and César Birotteau's name will be posted up at every street-corner, and all over the hoardings, wherever there is building going on.'

'Oh, no such thing ! I shall open a branch business under the name of Popinot. I shall take a shop somewhere near the Rue des Lombards, and put in young Anselme Popinot to look after it. I shall pay a debt of gratitude which we owe to M. and Mme. Ragon by starting their nephew in a business that may make his

fortune. The poor Ragons have looked very seedy for some time past, I have thought.'

'There! those people are after your money.'

'Why, what people, my charmer? Your own uncle, who loves us like his own life, and comes to dine here every Sunday? Then there is that kind old Ragon, our predecessor, who plays boston with us; old Ragon, with a record of forty years of fair dealing. And lastly, do you mean Roguin, a notary of Paris, a man of fifty, who has been in practice for twenty-five years? A notary of Paris would be the best of the bunch if all honest folk were not equally good. My partners will help me out at a pinch. Where is the plot, darling?—Look here, I must give you a piece of my mind. On my word as an honest man, it weighs upon me.—You have always been as suspicious as a cat! As soon as we had two pennyworth of goods in the shop, you began to think that the customers were thieves.—A man has to go down on his knees and beg and pray of you to allow your fortune to be made. For a daughter of Paris, you have scarcely any ambition! If it were not for your eternal fears, there would not be a happier man than I am.—If I had listened to you, I should never have made the Pâte des Sultanes nor the Carminative Toilet Lotion. We have made a living out of the shop, but it was those two discoveries and our soaps that brought in the hundred and sixty thousand francs which we have over and above the business!—But for my genius, for I have talent as a perfumer, we should be petty shopkeepers, hard put to it to make both ends meet, and I should not be one of the notable merchants who elect the judges at the Tribunal of Commerce; I should neither have been a judge nor a deputy-mayor. Do you know what I should have been? A shopkeeper like old Ragon,—no offence to him, for I respect shops; a shop has been the making of us. After selling perfumery for forty years, we should have had three thousand livres a year, as he has; and as prices go

now, when things are twice as dear as they used to be, we too should have had hardly enough to live upon. (Day after day, it goes to my heart more and more to think of that old couple. I must come at the truth; I will have it out of Popinot to-morrow.)—Yes, if I had taken advice of you, of you that are afraid of your own luck, and are always asking if you will have to-morrow what you hold to-day, I should have no credit, nor the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and I should not be looked on as a man who knows what he is about. Oh, you may shake your head; if this succeeds, I may be deputy for Paris some day. Aha! I was not named César for nothing; everything has succeeded with me.—This is inconceivable! Everybody out of my own house admits that I have some capacity; but here at home, the one person that I want so much to please, and I toil and moil to make her happy, is just the very one who takes me for a fool.'

There was such a depth of real and constant affection in these phrases, divided up by eloquent pauses, and hurled forth like cannon balls (as is the wont of those who take up a recriminating attitude), that Mme. Birotteau in her secret heart felt touched, but, wife-like, she took advantage of the love she inspired to gain her own ends.

'Very well, Birotteau,' said she, 'if you love me, let me be happy in my own way. Neither you nor I have had any education; we do not know how to talk, nor how to flatter like worldly-wise people, and how can you expect that we should succeed in office under Government? I myself should be quite happy at the Treasury Farm. I have always been fond of animals and birds, and I could spend my time quite well in looking after the poultry, and living like a farmer's wife. Let us sell the business, marry our Césarine, and let your *Imogen* alone. We will pass the winters in Paris in our son-in-law's house, and we shall be happy; nothing in politics nor in business could change our ways. Why should you try to

eclipse other people? Is not our fortune enough for us? When you are a millionaire, will you be able to eat two dinners a day? Do you want another wife? Look at uncle Pillerault! He is wisely satisfied with what he has, and spends his life in doing good. What does HE want with fine furniture? For I know you have been ordering furniture; I saw Braschon in the shop, and he was not here to buy scent.'

'Well, yes, darling, there is some furniture ordered for you. The workmen will begin to-morrow under an architect recommended by M. de la Billardière.'

'Good Lord, have mercy upon us!'

'Why, you are unreasonable, pet. Do you think that, fresh and pretty as you are, you can go and bury yourself at thirty-seven at Chinon? I myself, thank the Lord, am only thirty-nine. Chance has opened up a fine career to me, and I am going to enter upon it. If I manage wisely, I can found a house famous among Paris citizens, as people used to do, build up a business, and the Birotteaus shall be like Roguin, Cochin, Guillaume, Le Bas, Nucingen, Saillard, Popinot, and Matifat, all of whom are making, or have made, their mark in their quarter. Come! come! if this speculation were not as safe as gold ingots——'

'Safe!'

'Yes, safe. I have been reckoning it out these two months. Without appearing to do so, I have been making inquiries as to building, at the Hôtel de Ville, and of architects and contractors. M. Grindot, the young architect who is to remodel our place, is in despair because he has no capital to invest in our speculation.'

'He knows that there will be houses to build; he is urging you on so as to gobble you up.'

'Can people like Pillerault, like Charles Claparon, and Roguin be taken in? The gain is as certain as the profits on the *Pâte*, you see.'

'But why should Roguin want to speculate, dear, when he has bought his practice and made his fortune? I see him go by sometimes; he looks as thoughtful as a minister; he has an underhand look that I do not like; he has secret cares. In five years he has come to look like an old rake. Whose word have you for it that he will not take to his heels as soon as your money is in his hands? Such things have been known. Do we know much about him? It is true that we have been acquainted for fifteen years, but he is not one that I would put my hand into the fire for. I have it! he has ozæna; he does not live with his wife; he has mistresses no doubt, and they are ruining him; there is no other reason for his low spirits that I see. As I dress in the morning, I look through the blinds, and I see him going home on foot. Where does he come from? Nobody knows. It looks to me as if he had another establishment somewhere in town, and he spends one way, and madame another.

'Is that a life for a notary? If they make fifty thousand francs and get through sixty thousand, there will be an end of the money; in twenty years time they would be as bare as shorn lambs; but if a man is used to shine, he will plunder his friends without mercy. Charity should properly begin at home. That little rascal du Tillet, who used to be with us, is one of his cronies, and I see nothing good in that friendship. If he could not find out du Tillet, he is very blind; and if he knows him, why does he make so much of him? You will say that there is something between Roguin's wife and du Tillet. Very well; I look for no good from a man who has no sense of honour where his wife is concerned. And in any case, aren't the owners of the building lots very stupid to sell the worth of a hundred francs for a hundred sous? If you were to meet a child who did not know what a louis was worth, would you not tell him? Your stroke of business looks to

me myself very much like a robbery, no offence to you.'

'Dear me! what queer things women are sometimes, and how they mix up their ideas! If Roguin had never meddled in the matter, you would have said, "Stay, César, stop a bit; you are acting without consulting Roguin, it will come to no good." In this present instance he is pledged as it were, and you tell me——'

'No; it is a M. Claparon.'

'But a notary's name cannot appear in a speculation.'

'Then why should he do something against the law? What do you say to *that*, you who are such a stickler for the law?'

'Just let me go on. Roguin is going into it himself, and you tell me that it will come to no good. Is that sensible? Again you say, "He is doing something against the law." But his name will appear in it if necessary. And now you tell me that "he is rich." Might not people say as much of me? Ragon and Pillerault might just as well say of me, "Why are you going into this when you are wallowing in riches?"'

'A tradesman is one thing and a notary another,' objected Mme. Birotteau.

'In short, my conscience is quite clear,' César went on. 'People who sell, sell because they cannot help it; we are no more robbing them than we rob fund-holders when we buy at seventy-five. To-day you buy building lots at to-day's prices; in two years time it will be different, just as it is with *rentes*. You may be quite sure, Constance-Barbe-Joséphine Pillerault, that you will never catch César Birotteau doing anything that is against the law, nor against his conscience, nor unscrupulous, or not strictly just and fair. That a man who has been in business eighteen years should be suspected in his own family of cheating!'

'Come, César, be pacified! A wife who has known you all that time knows the depths of your soul. You

are the master after all. You made the money, didn't you? It is yours; you can spend it. We might be brought to the lowest depths of poverty, but neither your daughter nor I would ever say a single word of reproach. But listen. When you invented the Pâte des Sultanes and the Carminative Toilet Lotion, what risk did you run? Five or six thousand francs perhaps. To-day you are risking all you have on a single stake, and you are not the only player in this game, and some of the others may turn out sharper than you are.

'You could give this ball and have the rooms redecorated, and spend a thousand francs over it—a useless expense, but not ruinous—but as to the Madeleine affair, I am against it, once and for all. You are a perfumer; be a perfumer, and not a speculator in building land. We women have an instinct that does not lead us astray. I have warned you; now act on your own ideas. You have been a judge at the Tribunal of Commerce, you know the law, you have steered your boat wisely, and I will follow you, César! But I shall have misgivings until I see our fortune on a sound basis and Césarine well married. God send that my dream was not prophetic!'

This meekness was annoying to Birotteau. He had recourse to a simple stratagem, which he found useful on such occasions.

'Listen, Constance; I have not really given my word, though it is as good as if I had.'

'Oh! César, there is nothing more to be said, so let us say no more about it. Honour before riches. Come, get into bed, dear; there is no firewood left. Besides, it is easier to talk in bed if it amuses you.—Oh! the bad dream I had! Good Lord, to see *yourself*! Why, it was fearful! . . . Césarine and I will make a pretty number of *neuvaines* for the success of the land.'

'Of course, the help of God would do us no harm,' Birotteau said gravely, 'but the essence of hazel-nuts is

a power likewise, wife. I discovered this, like the Pate des Sultanes, by accident ; the first time it was by opening a book, but it was an engraving of *Hero and Leander* that suggested this new idea to me. A woman, you know, pouring oil on her lover's head ; isn't it nice ? The most certain speculations are those that are based on vanity, self-love, or a regard for appearances. Those sentiments will never be extinct.'

'Alas, I see that clearly.'

'At a certain age,' pursued Birotteau, 'men will do anything to grow hair on their heads when they have none. Hairdressers have told me for some time past that they are selling hair-dyes and all sorts of drugs that are said to promote the growth of the hair as well as Macassar Oil. Since the peace, men live more among women, and women do not like bald heads, eh ! eh ! *mimi !*' So the demand for that class of article can be explained by the political situation.

'A composition which would keep your hair in good condition would sell like bread, and all the more so because the essence will doubtless be approved by the Académie des Sciences. Perhaps kind M. Vauquelin will do me another good turn. I shall go to submit my notion to him to-morrow, and ask him to accept that engraving which I have found at last after inquiring for it for two years in Germany. M. Vauquelin is engaged in analysing hair, precisely the subject, so Chiffreville (who is associated with him in the production of chemicals) tells me. If my discovery concurs with his, my essence will be bought by both sexes. There is a fortune in my idea, I repeat. Good Heavens ! I cannot sleep for it. Eh ! luckily, little Popinot has the finest head of hair in the world. With a young lady in the shop whose hair should reach to the ground, and who should say (if the thing is possible without sinning against God or your neighbour) that the Comagen Oil (for it is decidedly an oil) counts for something in

bringing that about; all the grizzled heads will be down upon it like poverty upon the world. And I say, dearie, how about your ball? I am not spiteful, but I really should like to have that little rogue of a du Tillet, who swaggers about and never sees me on 'Change. He knows that I know something that is not pretty about him. Perhaps I let him off too easily. How funny it is, wife, that one should always be punished for good actions; here below, of course! I have been like a father to him; you do not know all that I have done for him.'

'Simply to hear you talk of him makes my flesh creep. If you had known what he intended to do to you, you would not have kept the theft of three thousand francs so quiet (for I have guessed how the thing was arranged). If you had put him in the police court, perhaps you might have done a good many people a service.'

'What did he mean to do to me?'

'Nothing. Birotteau, if you were inclined to listen to me to-night, I would give you a bit of sound advice, and that is to let du Tillet alone.'

'Would not people think it very strange if I were to forbid an old assistant my house after I had been his surety for twenty thousand francs when he first started in business for himself? There, let us do good for its own sake. And perhaps du Tillet has mended his ways.'

'Everything must be put topsy-turvy here!'

'What is this about topsy-turvy? Why, it will all be ruled like a sheet of music. So you have forgotten already what I have just told you about the staircase, and how I have arranged with Cayron, the umbrella merchant next door, to take part of his house! He and I must go together in the morning to see his landlord, M. Molineux. I have as much business on hand to-morrow as a Minister.'

'You have made me dizzy with your plans,' said

Constance; 'I am muddled with them; and besides, Birotteau, I am sleepy.'

'Good morning,' returned her husband. 'Just listen —I say good morning, because it is morning now, *mimi*! Ah! she has dropped off to sleep, dear child! There! you shall be the richest of the rich, or my name will not be César any longer,' and a few minutes later Constance and César were peacefully snoring.

A rapid glance over the previous history of this household will confirm the impression which should have been conveyed by the friendly dispute between the two principal personages in this *Scène*, in which the lives of a retail shopkeeper and his wife are depicted. This sketch will explain, moreover, the strange chances by which César Birotteau became a perfumer, a deputy-mayor, an ex-officer of the National Guard, and a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. By laying bare the depths of his character and the springs of his greatness, it will be possible to comprehend how it is that the vicissitudes of commerce, which strong heads turn to their advantage, become irreparable catastrophes for weaker spirits. Events are never absolute; their consequences depend entirely upon the individual. The misfortune which is a stepping-stone for genius, becomes a piscina for the Christian, a treasure for a quick-witted man, and for weaklings an abyss.

A cotter, Jacques Birotteau by name, living near Chinon, took unto himself a wife, a domestic servant in the house of a lady, who employed him in her vineyard. Three sons were born to them; his wife died at the birth of the third, and the poor fellow did not long survive her. Then the mistress, out of affection for her maid, adopted the oldest of the cotter's boys; she brought him up with her own son, and placed him in a seminary. This François Birotteau took orders, and during the

Revolution led the wandering life of priests who would not take the oath, hiding from those who hunted them down like wild beasts, lucky to meet with no worse fate than the guillotine. At the time when this story begins he was a priest of the cathedral at Tours, and had but once left that city to see his brother César. On that occasion the traffic in the streets of Paris so bewildered the good man that he dared not leave his room; he called the cabs 'half-coaches,' and was astonished at everything. He stayed one week, and then went back to Tours, promising himself that he would never revisit the capital.

The vinedresser's second son, Jean Birotteau, was drawn by the army, and during the early wars of the Revolution promptly became a captain. At the battle of the Trebbia, Macdonald called for volunteers to storm a battery, and Captain Jean Birotteau charged with his company and fell. It appeared to be the destiny of the Birotteaus that other men should supplant them, or that events should be too strong for them wherever they might be.

The youngest son is the chief actor in this *Scène*. When César was fourteen years old, and could read, write, and cipher, he left the district, and with one louis in his pocket set out on foot for Paris to make his fortune. On the recommendation of an apothecary in Tours, M. and Mme. Ragon, retail perfumers, took him as errand boy. César at that time was possessed of a pair of hobnailed shoes, a pair of breeches, blue stockings, a sprigged waistcoat, a countryman's jacket, three ample shirts of good linen, and a stout walking-stick. His hair might be clipped like a chorister's, but he was a solidly-built Tourangeau; and any tendency to the laziness rampant in his district was counteracted in him by a strong desire to make his way in the world. Perhaps he was lacking somewhat in brains as in education, but he had inherited upright instincts and scrupulous integrity

from his mother, who had 'a heart of gold,' as they say in Touraine.

César was paid six francs a month by way of wages. He boarded in the house, and slept on a truckle-bed in the attics next to the servant's room. The shopmen showed him how to fetch and carry and tie up parcels, to sweep out the shop and the pavement before it, and made a butt of him, breaking him in to business after the manner of their kind, and contriving to blend a good deal of amusement (for themselves) with his instruction. M. and Mme. Ragon spoke to him as if he were a dog. Nobody cared how tired the apprentice might be, and he was often very tired and footsore of a night after tramping over the pavements, and his shoulders often ached. The principle 'each for himself,' that gospel of great cities, put in application, made Cesar's life in Paris a very hard one. He used to cry sometimes when the day was over, and he thought of Touraine, where the peasant works leisurely, and the mason takes his time about laying a stone, and toil is judiciously tempered by idleness; but he usually fell asleep before he reached the point of thinking of running away, for his morning's round of work awaited him, and he did his duty with the instinctive obedience of a yard dog. If he happened to complain, the first shopman would smile jocosely. 'Ah, my boy,' said he, 'life is not all roses at the *Queen of Roses*, and larks don't drop ready roasted into your mouth; first catch your lark, and then you want the other things before you cook it.'

The cook, a stout Picarde, kept the best morsels for herself, and never spoke to Cesar but to complain of M. and Mme. Ragon, who left her nothing to purloin. On one Sunday at the end of every month she was obliged to stop in the house, and then she broke ground with César. Ursule, scoured for Sunday, was a charming creature in the eyes of the poor errand boy, who, but for a chance, was about to make shipwreck on the first

sunken reef in his career. Like all human beings who have no one to care for them, he fell in love with the first woman who gave him a kind glance. The cook took César under her wing, and secret love passages followed, at which the assistants jeered unmercifully. Luckily, two years later, the cook threw over César for a young runaway from the army, a fellow-countryman of hers who was hiding in Paris; and the Picard, a land-owner to the extent of several acres, allowed himself to be drawn into a marriage with Ursule.

But during those two years the cook fed her lad César well, and explained to him the seamy side of not a few of the mysteries of Paris. Motives of jealousy led her to instil into him a perfect horror of low haunts, whose perils seemingly were not unknown to her. In 1792 César, the basely deserted, had grown accustomed to his life; his feet were used to the pavements, his shoulders accommodated to packing-cases, his wits to what he called the *humbug* of Paris. So, when Ursule threw him over, he promptly took comfort, for she had not realised any of his intuitive ideas as to sentiments. Lascivious, bad-tempered, fawning, and rapacious, a selfish woman, given to drink, she had jarred on Birotteau's unsophisticated nature, and had opened out no fair future to him. At times the poor boy saw with dismay that he was bound by the strongest of ties for a simple heart to a creature with whom he had no sympathy. By the time that he was set free he had developed, and had reached the age of sixteen. His wits had been sharpened by Ursule and by the shopmen's jokes; he set himself to learn the business. Intelligence was hidden beneath his simplicity. He watched the customers with shrewd eyes. In his spare moments he asked for explanations concerning the goods; he remembered where everything was kept; one fine day he knew the goods, prices, and quantities in stock better than the newer comers, and thenceforward

M. and Mme. Ragon looked on him as a settled institution.

When the Requisition of the terrible year II. made a clean sweep of Citizen Ragon's house, César Birotteau, promoted to be second assistant, improved his position, received a salary of fifty livres per month, and seated himself at the Ragons' table with joy unspeakable. The second assistant at the sign of the *Queen of Roses* had by this time saved six hundred francs, and he now had a room filled with furniture such as he had for a long time coveted, in which he could keep the belongings which he had accumulated under lock and key. On Décadis, dressed after the fashion of an epoch which affected rough and homely ways, the quiet, humble peasant lad looked at least the equal of other young citizens, and in this way he overleapt the social barriers which in domestic life would, in different times, have been raised between the peasant and the trading classes. Towards the end of that year his honesty won for him the control of the till. The awe-inspiring Citoyenne Ragon saw to his linen, and husband and wife treated him like one of the family.

In Vendémiaire 1794 César Birotteau, being possessed of one hundred gold louis, exchanged them for six thousand francs in assignats, bought *rentes* therewith at thirty francs, paid for them when depreciated prices ruled on the Exchange, and hoarded his stock-receipt with unspeakable delight. From that day forward he followed the rise and fall of the funds and the course of events with a secret anxiety that made his heart beat fast at the tidings of every victory or defeat which marked the history of that period.

At this critical period M. Ragon, sometime purveyor of perfumes to Her Majesty Queen Marie-Antoinette, confided to César Birotteau his attachment to the fallen tyrants. This confidence was an event of capital importance in Cesar's life. The Tourangeau was transformed into a fanatical adherent of Royalty in the

course of evening conversations after the shutters were put up, the books posted, and the streets quiet without. César was simply obeying his natural instincts. His imagination kindled at the tale of the virtuous deeds of Louis XVI., followed by anecdotes told by husband and wife of the good qualities of the Queen whom they extolled. His tender heart was revolted by the horrible fate of the two crowned heads, struck off but a few paces from the shop door, and he conceived a hatred for a system of government which poured forth innocent blood that cost nothing to shed.

Commercial instincts made him quick to see the death of trade in the law of maximum prices, and in political storms, which always bode ill to business. In his quality of perfumer, moreover, he loathed a Revolution that forbade powder, and was responsible for the fashion of wearing the hair *à la Titus*. The tranquillity secured to the nation by an absolute monarchy seemed to be the one possible condition in which life and property would be safe, so he waxed zealous for a monarchy.

M. Ragon, finding so apt a disciple, made him his assistant in the shop, and initiated him into the secrets of the *Queen of Roses*. Some of the customers were the most active and devoted of the secret agents of the Bourbons, and kept up a correspondence between Paris and the West. Carried away by youthful enthusiasm, electrified by contact with such men as Georges, La Billardière, Montauran, Bauvan, Longuy, Manda, Bernier, du Guénic, and Fontaine, César flung himself into the conspiracy of the 13th Vendémiaire, when Royalists and Terrorists combined against the dying Convention.

César had the honour of warring against Napoleon on the steps of the Church of Saint-Roch, and was wounded at the beginning of the action. Every one knows the result of this attempt. The obscurity from which Barras's aide-de-camp then emerged was Birotteau's

salvation. A few friends carried the bellicose counter-hand home to the *Queen of Roses*, where he lay in hiding in the garret, nursed by Mme. Ragon, and lucky to be forgotten. César's military courage had been nothing but a flash. During his month of convalescence he came to some sound conclusions as to the ludicrous alliance of politics and perfumery. If a Royalist he remained, he made up his mind that he would be simply and solely a Royalist perfumer, that he would never compromise himself again, and he threw himself body and soul into his calling.

After the 18th Brumaire, M. and Mme. Ragon, despairing of the Royalist cause, determined to retire from the perfumery trade, to live like respectable private citizens, and to cease to meddle in politics. If they were to receive the full value of their business, it behoved them to find a man who had more honesty than ambition, and more homely sense than brilliancy, so Ragon broached the matter to his first assistant. Birotteau hesitated. He was twenty years old, with a thousand francs a year invested in the public funds; it was his ambition to go to live near Chinon as soon as he should have fifteen hundred francs a year, and the First Consul, after consolidating his position at the Tuileries, should have consolidated the national debt. He asked himself why he should risk his little honestly-earned independence in business. He had never expected to make so much wealth; it was entirely owing to chances which are only embraced in youth; and now he was thinking of taking a wife in Touraine, a woman who should have an equal fortune, so that he might buy and cultivate a little property called the Treasury Farm, a bit of land on which he had set longing eyes since he had come to man's estate. He dreamed of adding more land to the Treasury Farm, of making a thousand crowns a year, of leading a happy and obscure life there. He was on the point of refusing the perfumer's offer, when love suddenly altered his

resolutions and multiplied the total of his ambitions by ten.

Since Ursule's base desertion, César had led a steady life; this was partly a consequence of hard work, partly a dread of the risks run in pursuit of pleasure in Paris. Desire that remains unsatisfied becomes a craving, and marriage for the lower middle classes becomes a fixed idea, for it is the one way open to them of winning and appropriating a woman. César Birotteau was in this case. The first assistant was the responsible person at the *Queen of Roses;* he had not a moment to spare for amusement. In such a life the craving is still more imperatively felt; so it happened that the apparition of a handsome girl, to whom a dissipated young fellow would scarcely have given a thought, was bound to make the greatest impression upon the steady César.

One fine June day, as he was about to cross the Pont Marie to the Ile Saint-Louis, he saw a girl standing in the doorway of a corner shop on the Quai d'Anjou. Constance Pillerault was a forewoman in a linen-drapery establishment, at the sign of the *Little Sailor*, a pioneer instance of a kind of shop which has since spread all over Paris, with painted signboards more or less in evidence, flying flags, much display. Shawls are suspended in the windows, and piles of cravats erected like card castles, together with countless devices to attract custom, ribbon streamers, showcards, notices of fixed prices; optical illusions and effects carried to the pitch of perfection which has made of shop windows the fairyland of commerce.

The low prices asked at the sign of the *Little Sailor* for the goods described as 'novelties' had brought this shop, in one of the quietest and least fashionable quarters of Paris, an unheard-of influx of custom.

The aforesaid young lady behind the counter was as celebrated for her beauty as *La belle Limonadière* of the Café des Milles Colonnes at a later day, and not a few others whose unfortunate lot it has been to attract faces

young and old, more numerous than the paving stones of Paris, to the windows of milliners' shops and cafés. The first assistant from the *Queen of Roses*, whose life was spent between Saint-Roch and the Rue de la Sourdière, in the daily routine of the perfumery business, did not so much as suspect the existence of the *Little Sailor*, for retailers in Paris know very little of each other.

César was so violently smitten with the beautiful Constance that he hurried tempestuously into the *Little Sailor* to bargain for half-a-dozen linen shirts. Long did he haggle over the price, bale after bale of linen was displayed for his inspection; he behaved exactly like an Englishwoman in a humour for shopping. The young lady condescended to interest herself in César's purchase; perceiving, by certain signs which women understand, that he had come to the shop more for the sake of the saleswoman than for her goods. He gave his name and address to the young lady, who became quite indifferent to the customer's admiration as soon as he had made his purchase. The poor assistant had done but little to gain Ursule's good graces; if he had been sheepish then, love now made him more sheepish still; he did not dare to say a syllable, and was, moreover, too much dazzled to note the indifference which succeeded to the smiles of this siren of commerce.

Every evening for a week he took up his post before the *Little Sailor*, hanging about for a glance as a dog waits for a bone at a kitchen door; regardless of the gibes in which the shopmen and saleswomen indulged at his expense; making way meekly for customers or passers-by, watchful of every little change that took place in the shop. A few days later, he again entered the paradise where his angel dwelt, not so much to purchase pocket-handkerchiefs of her as with a view of communicating a luminous idea to the angel's mind.

'If you should require any perfumery, mademoiselle,'

he remarked, as he paid the bill, 'I could supply you in the same way.'

Constance Pillerault daily received brilliant proposals, in which there was never any mention of marriage; and though her heart was as pure as her white forehead, it was not until the indefatigable César had proved his love by six months of strategical operations, that she deigned to receive his attentions. Even then she would not commit herself. Prudence had been demanded of her by the multitudinous number of her admirers—wholesale wine merchants, well-to-do bar-keepers, and others, who made eyes at her. The lover found a supporter in her guardian, M. Claude-Joseph Pillerault, an ironmonger on the Quai de la Ferraille, a discovery made by the secret espionage which is pre-eminently a lover's shift.

In this rapid sketch, it is impossible to describe the delights of this harmless Parisian love-intrigue; the little extravagances characteristic of the shopman—the first melons of the season, the little dinners at Vénua's, followed by the theatre, the drives into the country in a cab on Sunday—must be passed over in silence. César was not a positively handsome young fellow, but there was nothing in his appearance to repel love. Life in Paris and days spent in a dark shop had toned down the high colour natural to the peasant lad. His thick black hair, his Norman breadth of shoulder, his sturdy limbs, his simple straightforward look, all contributed to prepossess people in his favour. Uncle Pillerault, the responsible guardian of his brother's child, made various inquiries about the Tourangeau, and gave his consent; and in the fair month of May 1800, Mlle. Pillerault promised to marry César Birotteau. He nearly fainted with joy when Constance-Barbe-Joséphine accepted him as her husband under a lime-tree at Sceaux.

'You will have a good husband, my little girl,' said M. Pillerault. 'He has a warm heart and sentiments of

honour. He is as straight as a line, and as good as the Child Jesus; he is a king of men, in short.'

Constance put away once and for all the dreams of a brilliant future, which, like most shop girls, she had sometimes indulged. She meant to be a faithful wife and a good mother, and took up this life in accordance with the religious programme of the middle classes. After all, this part suited her ideas much better than the dangerous vanities tempting to a youthful Parisian imagination. Constance's intelligence was a narrow one; she was the typical small tradesman's wife, who always grumbles a little over her work, who refuses a thing at the outset, and is vexed when she is taken at her word; whose restless activity takes all things, from cash-box to kitchen, as its province, and supervises everything, from the weightiest business transactions down to almost invisible darns in the household linen. Such a woman scolds while she loves, and can only conceive ideas of the very simplest; only the small change, as it were, of thought passes current with her; she argues about everything, lives in chronic fear of the unknown, makes constant forecasts, and is always thinking of the future. Her statuesque yet girlish beauty, her engaging looks, her freshness, prevented Cesar from thinking of her shortcomings; and, moreover, she made up for them by a woman's sensitive conscientiousness, an excessive thrift, by her fanatical love of work, and genius as a saleswoman.

Constance was just eighteen years old, and the possessor of eleven thousand francs. César, in whom love had developed the most unbounded ambition, bought the perfumery business, and transplanted the *Queen of Roses* to a handsome shop near the Place Vendôme. He was only twenty-one years of age, married to a beautiful and adored wife, and almost the owner of his establishment, for he had paid three-fourths of the amount. He saw (how should he have seen otherwise?) the future in fair colours,

which seemed fairer still as he measured his career from its starting-point.

Roguin (Ragon's notary) drew up the marriage-contract, and gave sage counsels to the young perfumer; he it was who interfered when the latter was about to complete the purchase of the business with his wife's money. 'Just keep the money by you, my boy; ready money is sometimes a handy thing in a business,' he had said.

Birotteau gazed at the notary in admiration, fell into the habit of consulting him, and made a friend of Roguin. Like Ragon and Pillerault, he had so much faith in notaries as a class, that he placed himself in Roguin's hands without admitting a doubt of him. Thanks to this advice, César started business with the eleven thousand francs brought him by Constance; and would not have 'changed places' with the First Consul, however brilliant Napoleon's lot might seem to be.

At first the Birotteau establishment had but one servant-maid. They lodged on the mezzanine floor above the shop. In this sort of den, passably furnished by an upholsterer, the newly-wedded pair entered upon a perennial honeymoon. Mme. César at her cash desk was a marvel to see. Her famous beauty exercised an enormous influence on the sales; the dandies of the Empire talked of nothing but the lovely Mme. Birotteau. If César's political principles were tainted with Royalism, it was acknowledged that his business principles were above suspicion; and if some of his fellow-tradesmen envied him his luck, he was believed to deserve it. That shot on the steps of the Church of Saint-Roch had gained him a certain reputation—he was looked upon as a brave man, and a man deep in political secrets; though he had nothing of a soldier's courage in his composition, and not even a rudimentary political notion in his head.

On these data the good folk of the Arrondissement made him a Captain of the National Guard, but he was

cashiered by Napoleon (according to Birotteau, that matter of Vendémiaire still rankled in the First Consul's mind), and thenceforward César was invested with a certain halo of martyrdom, cheaply acquired, which made him interesting to opponents, and gave him a certain importance.

Here, in brief, is the history of this household, so happy in itself, and disturbed by none but business cares.

During the first year, César instructed his wife in all the ins and outs of the perfumery business, which she was admirably quick to grasp; she might have been brought into the world for that sole purpose, so well did she adapt herself to her customers. The result of the stocktaking at the end of the year alarmed the ambitious perfumer. After deducting all expenses, he might perhaps hope, in twenty years time, to make the modest sum of a hundred thousand francs, the price of his felicity. He determined then and there to find some speedier road to fortune, and, by way of a beginning, to be a manufacturer as well as a retailer.

Acting against his wife's counsel, he took the lease of a shed on some building land in the Faubourg du Temple, and painted up thereon, in huge letters, CÉSAR BIROTTEAU'S FACTORY. He enticed a workman from Grasse, and with him began to manufacture several kinds of soap, essences, and eau-de-cologne, on the system of half profits. The partnership only lasted six months, and ended in a loss, which he had to sustain alone; but Birotteau did not lose heart. He meant to obtain a result at any price, if it were only to escape a scolding from his wife; and, indeed, he confessed to her afterwards that, in those days of despair, his head used to boil like a pot on the fire, and that many a time, but for his religious principles, he would have thrown himself into the Seine.

One day, depressed by several unsuccessful experi-

With his back against a tree in the Boulevard, he turned the pages over

Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher

ments, he was sauntering home to dinner along the boulevards (the lounger in Paris is a man in despair quite as often as a genuine idler), when a book among a hamperful at six sous a-piece caught his attention; his eyes were attracted by the yellow dusty title-page, *Abdeker*, so it ran, *or the Art of Preserving Beauty.*

Birotteau took up the work. It claimed to be a translation from the Arabic, but in reality it was a sort of romance written by a physician in the previous century. César happened to stumble upon a passage therein which treated of perfumes, and with his back against a tree in the boulevard, he turned the pages over till he reached a footnote, wherein the learned author discoursed of the nature of the dermis and epidermis. The writer showed conclusively that such and such an unguent or soap often produced an effect exactly opposite to that intended, and the ointment, or the soap, acted as a tonic upon a skin that required a lenitive treatment, or *vice versâ.*

Birotteau saw a fortune in the book, and bought it. Yet, feeling little confidence in his unaided lights, he went to Vauquelin, the celebrated chemist, and in all simplicity asked him how to compose a double cosmetic which should produce the required effect upon the human epidermis in either case. The really learned—men so truly great in this sense that they can never receive in their lifetime all the fame that should reward vast labours like theirs—are almost always helpful and kindly to the poor in intellect. So it was with Vauquelin. He came to the assistance of the perfumer, gave him a formula for a paste to whiten the hands, and allowed him to style himself its inventor. It was this cosmetic that Birotteau called the Superfine Pâte des Sultanes. The more thoroughly to accomplish his purpose, he used the recipe for the paste for a wash for the complexion, which he called the Carminative Toilet Lotion.

He took a hint from the *Little Sailor*, and was the first among perfumers to make the lavish use of placards, handbills, and diverse kinds of advertisement, which, perhaps not undeservedly, are called quackery. The Pâte des Sultanes and the Carminative Toilet Lotion were introduced to the polite world and to commerce by gorgeous placards, with the words *Approved by the Institute* at the head. The effect of this formula, employed thus for the first time, was magical. Not France only, but the face of Europe was covered with flaming proclamations, yellow, scarlet, and blue, which informed the world that the sovereign lord of the *Queen of Roses* manufactured, kept in stock, and supplied everything in his line of business at moderate charges.

At a time when the East was the one topic of conversation, in a country where every man has a natural turn for the part of a sultan, and every woman is no less minded to become a sultana, the idea of giving to any cosmetic such a name as the Pâte des Sultanes might have occurred to any ordinary man, it needed no cleverness to foresee its fascination; but the public always judges by results, and Birotteau's reputation for business ability but grew the more when he indited a prospectus, and the very absurdity of its language contributed to its success. In France we only laugh at men and things who are talked about, and those who fail to make any mark are not talked about. So although Birotteau's stupidity was real and not feigned, people gave him credit for playing the fool on purpose.

A copy of the prospectus has been procured, not without difficulty, by the house of Popinot & Co., druggists in the Rue des Lombards. In a more elevated connection this curious piece of rhetoric would be styled an historical document, and valued for the light that it

sheds on contemporary manners. Here, therefore, it is given :—

CÉSAR BIROTTEAU'S

SUPERFINE PÂTE DES SULTANES

AND

CARMINATIVE TOILET LOTION.

A MARVELLOUS DISCOVERY !

Approved by the Institute.

'For some time past a preparation for the hands, and a toilet lotion more efficacious than Eau-de-Cologne, have been generally desired by both sexes throughout Europe. After devoting long nights to the study of the dermis and epidermis of both sexes—for both attach, and with reason, the greatest importance to the softness, suppleness, bloom, and delicate surface of the skin—M. Birotteau, a perfumer of high standing, and well known in the capital and abroad, has invented two preparations, which from their first appearance have been deservedly called "marvellous" by people of the highest fashion in Paris. Both preparations possess astonishing properties, and act upon the skin without bringing about premature wrinkles, the inevitable result of the rash use of the drugs hitherto compounded by ignorance and cupidity.

'These inventions are based upon the difference of temperaments, which are divided into two great classes, are indicated by the difference of colour in the pâte and the lotion; the rose-coloured preparations being intended for the dermis and epidermis of persons of lymphatic constitution, and the white for those endowed with a sanguine temperament.

'The pâte is called the *Pâte des Sultanes*, because the specific was in the first instance invented for the Seraglio by an Arab physician. It has been approved by the Institute on the report of our illustrious chemist Vauquelin, and the lotion, likewise approved, is compounded upon the same principles.

'The Pâte des Sultanes, an invaluable preparation, which exhales the sweetest fragrance, dissipates the most obstinate freckles, whitens the skin in the most stubborn cases, and represses the perspiration of the hand from which women suffer no less than men.

'*The Carminative Toilet Lotion* removes the slight pimples which sometimes appear inopportunely on ladies' faces, and contravene their projects for the ball; it refreshes and revives the colour by opening or closing the pores of the skin in accordance with the exigencies of the temperament, while its efficacy in arresting the ravages of time is so well known already that many ladies, out of gratitude, call it the *Friend of Beauty*.

'Eau-de-Cologne is purely and simply an ordinary perfume without special efficacy, while the Superfine Pâte des Sultanes and the Carminative Toilet Lotion are two active remedies, powerful agents, perfectly harmless in their operation of seconding the efforts of nature; their perfumes, essentially balsamic and exhilarating, admirably refresh the animal spirits, and charm and revive ideas. Their merits are as marvellous as their simplicity; in short, to woman they offer an added charm, while a means of attraction is put within the reach of man.

'The daily use of the Carminative Toilet Lotion allays the smarting sensation caused by shaving, while it keeps the lips red and smooth, and prevents chapping; it gradually dissipates freckles by natural means; and finally, it restores tone to the complexion. These results are the signs of that perfect equilibrium of the humours of the body, which ensures immunity from the migraine to those who are subject to that distressing complaint. In short, the Carminative Toilet Lotion, which may be used in all the operations of the toilet, is a preventive of cutaneous affections, by permitting free transpiration through the tissues, while imparting a permanent bloom to the skin.

'All communications should be prepaid, and addressed to M. César Birotteau (late Ragon), Perfumer to her late Majesty, Queen Marie-Antoinette, at the *Queen of Roses*, Rue Saint-Honoré, near the Place Vendôme, Paris.

'*The price of the Pâte is three livres per tablet, and of the Toilet Lotion, six livres per bottle.*

'To prevent fraudulent imitations, M. Birotteau warns the public that the wrapper of every tablet bears his signature, and that his name is stamped on every bottle of the Toilet Lotion.'

The success of this scheme was due, as a matter of fact (though César did not suspect it), to Constance, who proposed that they should send sample cases of the Carminative Toilet Lotion and the Superfine Pâte des Sultanes to every perfumer in France or abroad, offering, at the same time, a discount of thirty per cent. as an

inducement to take a gross of either article at a time.

The Pâte and the Lotion were really better than similar cosmetics, and the simple were attracted by that distinction made between the two temperaments. The discount was tempting to hundreds of perfumers all over France, and each would take annually three hundred gross or more of both preparations; and if the profits on each article were small, the demand was great, and the output enormous. César was able to buy the sheds and the plot of land in the Faubourg du Temple. He built a large factory there, and had the *Queen of Roses* magnificently decorated. The household began to feel the small comforts of an easier existence, and the wife quaked less than heretofore.

In 1810 Mme. César predicted a rise in house rents. At her instance her husband took the lease of the whole house above the shop, and they removed from the mezzanine floor (where they had begun housekeeping together) to the first floor. A piece of luck which befell them about that time decided Constance to shut her eyes to Birotteau's follies in the matter of decorating a room for her. The perfumer was made a judge of the Tribunal of Commerce. It was his character for integrity and conscientiousness, together with the esteem in which he was held, that gained this dignity for him; thenceforward he must be considered as a notable among the tradesmen of Paris.

He used to rise at five o'clock in the morning to read handbooks on jurisprudence and works which treated of commercial law. With his instinct for fair dealing, his uprightness, his readiness to take trouble—all qualities essential for the appreciation of the knotty points submitted to arbitration—he was one of the most highly esteemed judges in the Tribunal. His faults contributed no less to his reputation. César was so conscious of his inferiority that he was ready and willing to

take his colleagues' opinion, and they were flattered by the attention with which he listened to them. Some of them thought a good deal of the silent approbation of such a listener, reputed to be a hard-headed man ; others were delighted with his amiability and modesty, and extolled him on those grounds. Those amenable to his jurisdiction lauded his benevolence and conciliatory spirit, and he was often called in to act as arbitrator in disputes wherein his homely sense suggested to him a kind of Cadi's justice.

He managed to invent and use throughout his term of office a style of his own ; it was stuffed with platitudes, interspersed with trite sayings, and pieces of reasoning rounded into phrases which came out without effort, and sounded like eloquence in the ears of shallow people. In this way he commended himself to the naturally mediocre majority, condemned to penal servitude for life and to views of the earth earthy.

César lost so much time at the Tribunal that his wife put pressure upon him, and thenceforward he declined the costly honour.

In the year 1813 this household, thanks to its constant unity, after plodding along through life in a humdrum fashion, entered upon an era of prosperity which nothing seemingly ought to check.

M. and Mme. Ragon (their predecessors), Uncle Pillerault, Roguin the notary, the Matifats (druggists in the Rue des Lombards who supplied the *Queen of Roses*), Joseph Lebas (a retail draper, a leading light in the Rue Saint-Denis, successor to Guillaume at the *Cat and Racket*), Judge Popinot (Mme. Ragon's brother), Chiffreville (of the firm of Protez & Chiffreville), M. Cochin (a clerk of the Treasury, and a sleeping partner in Matifat's business), his wife, Mme. Cochin, and the Abbé Loraux (confessor and director of the devout among this little circle) made up, with one or two others, the number of their acquaintance. César Birotteau might

be a Royalist, but public opinion at that time was in his favour; and though he had scarcely a hundred thousand francs beside his business, was looked upon as a very wealthy man. His steady-going ways, his punctuality, his habit of paying ready money for everything, of never discounting bills, while he would take paper to oblige a customer of whom he was sure,—all these things, together with his readiness to oblige, had brought him a great reputation. And not only so; he had really made a good deal of money, but the building of his factories had absorbed most of it, and he paid nearly twenty thousand francs a year in rent. The education of their only daughter, whom Constance and César both idolised, had been a heavy expense. Neither the husband nor the wife thought of money where Césarine's pleasure was concerned, and they had never brought themselves to part with her.

Imagine the delight of the poor peasant-parvenu when he heard his charming Césarine play a sonata by Steibelt or sing a ballad; when he saw her writing French correctly, or making sepia drawings of landscape, or listened while she read aloud from the Racines, father and son, and explained the beauties of the poetry. What happiness it was for him to live again in this fair, innocent flower, not yet plucked from the parent stem; this angel, over whose growing graces and earliest development they had watched with such passionate tenderness; this only child, incapable of despising her father or of laughing at his want of education, so much was she his little daughter.

When César came to Paris, he had known how to read, write, and cipher, and at that point his education had been arrested. There had been no opportunity in his hard-working life of acquiring new ideas and information beyond the perfumery trade. He had spent his time among folk to whom science and literature were matters of indifference, and whose knowledge was of a

limited and special kind; he himself, having no time to spare for loftier studies, became perforce a practical man. He adopted (how should he have done otherwise?) the language, errors, and opinions of the Parisian tradesman who admires Molière, Voltaire, and Rousseau on hearsay, and buys their works, but never opens them; who will have it that the proper way to pronounce *armoire* is *ormoire: or* means gold, and *moire* means silk, and women's dresses used almost always to be made of silk, and in their cupboards they locked up silk and gold—therefore, *ormoire* is right and *armoire* is an innovation. Potier, Talma, Mlle. Mars, and other actors and actresses were millionaires ten times over, and did not live like ordinary mortals: the great tragedian lived on raw meat, and Mlle. Mars would have a fricassee of pearls now and then —an idea she had taken from some celebrated Egyptian actress. As to the Emperor, his waistcoat pockets were lined with leather, so that he could take a handful of snuff at a time; he used to ride at full gallop up the staircase of the orangery at Versailles. Authors and artists ended in the workhouse, the natural close to their eccentric careers; they were, every one of them, atheists into the bargain, so that you had to be very careful not to admit anybody of that sort into your house. Joseph Lebas used to advert with horror to the story of his sister-in-law Augustine who married the artist Sommervieux. Astronomers lived on spiders. These bright examples of the attitude of the bourgeois mind towards philology, the drama, politics, and science will throw light upon its breadth of view and powers of comprehension.

Let a poet pass along the Rue des Lombards, and some stray sweet scent shall set him dreaming of the East; for him, with the odour of the Khuskus grass, would come a vision of Nautch girls in an Eastern bath. The brilliant red lac would call up thoughts of Vedic hymns, of alien creeds and castes; and at a chance contact with an ivory tusk, he would mount an elephant

and make love, like the king of Lahore, in a muslin-curtained howdah.

But the petty tradesman does not so much as know whence the raw materials of his business are brought. Of natural history or of chemistry, Birotteau the perfumer, for instance, knew nothing whatever. It is true that he regarded Vauquelin as a great man, but Vauquelin was an exception. César himself was about on a par with the retired grocer, who summed up a discussion on the ways of growing tea by announcing with a knowing air that 'there are only two ways of obtaining tea—from Havre or by the overland route.' And Birotteau thought that aloes and opium were only to be found in the Rue des Lombards. People told you that attar of roses came from Constantinople, but, like eau-de-cologne, it was made in Paris. These names of foreign places were humbug; they had been invented to amuse the French nation, who cannot abide anything that is made in France. A French merchant has to call his discovery an English invention, or people will not buy it; it is just the same in England, the druggists there tell you that things come from France.

Yet César was not altogether a fool or a dunce: an honest and kind heart shed a lustre over everything that he did and made his a worthy life, and a kindly deed absolves all possible forms of ignorance. His unvarying success gave him assurance; and, in Paris, assurance, the sign of power, is taken for power itself.

César's wife, who had learned to know her husband's character during the early years of their marriage, led a life of perpetual terror; she represented sound sense and foresight in the partnership; she was doubt, opposition, and fear, while César represented boldness, ambition, activity, the element of chance and undreamed-of good luck. In spite of appearances, the merchant was the weaker vessel, and it was the wife who really had the patience and courage. So it had come to pass that a timid

mediocrity, without education, knowledge, or strength of character, a being who could in nowise have succeeded in the world's slipperiest places, was taken for a remarkable man, a man of spirit and resolution, thanks to his instinctive uprightness and sense of justice, to the goodness of a truly Christian soul, and love for the one woman who had been his.

The public only see results. Of all César's circle, only Pillerault and Judge Popinot saw beneath the surface; none of the rest could pronounce on his character. Those twenty or thirty friends, moreover, who met at one another's houses, retailed the same platitudes, repeated the same stale commonplaces, and each one among them regarded himself as superior to his company. There was a rivalry among the women in dinners and dress; each one summed up her husband in some contemptuous word.

Mme. Birotteau alone had the good sense to show respect and deference to her husband in public. She saw in him the man who, in spite of his private weaknesses, had made the wealth and earned the esteem which she shared along with him; though she sometimes privately wondered if all men who were spoken of as superior intellects were like her husband. This attitude of hers contributed not a little to maintain the respect and esteem shown by others to the merchant, in a country where wives are quick-witted enough to belittle their husbands and to complain of them.

The first days of the year 1814, so fatal to Imperial France, were memorable in the Birotteau household for two events, which would have passed almost unnoticed anywhere else; but they were of a kind to leave a deep impression on simple souls like César and his wife, who, looking back upon their past, found no painful memories.

They had engaged a young man of two-and-twenty, Ferdinand du Tillet by name, as first assistant. The lad had come to them from another house in the

perfumery trade, where they had declined to give him a percentage on the profits. He was thought to be a genius, and he had been very anxious to go to the *Queen of Roses*, knowing the place, and the people, and their ways. Birotteau had engaged him at a salary of a thousand francs, meaning that du Tillet should be his successor. This Ferdinand du Tillet was destined to exercise so great an influence over the family fortunes, that a few words must be said about him.

He had begun life simply on his Christian name of Ferdinand. There was an immense advantage in anonymity, he thought, at a time when Napoleon was pressing the young men of every family into the army; but if he had no name, he had been born somewhere, and owed his birth to some cruel or voluptuous fancy. Here, in brief, are the few facts known as to his name and designation.

In 1793 a poor girl of Tillet, a little hamlet near the Andelys, bore a child one night in the curé's garden at Tillet, tapped on the shutters, and then drowned herself. The good man received the child, named him after the saint of that day in the calendar, and reared him as if he had been his own son. In 1804 the curé died, and the little property that he left was insufficient to complete the education thus begun. Ferdinand, thrown upon Paris, there led the life of a freebooter, amid chances that might bring him to the scaffold or to fortune, to the bar, the army, commerce, or private life. Ferdinand, compelled to live like a very Figaro, first became a commercial traveller, then, after travelling round France, and seeing life, became a perfumer's assistant, with a fixed determination to make his way at all costs. In 1813 he considered it expedient to ascertain his age, and to acquire a status as a citizen; he therefore petitioned the Tribunal of the Andelys to transfer the entry of his baptism from the church records to the mayor's register; and, further, he asked that they should insert the surname

of du Tillet, which he had assumed, on the ground of his exposure at birth in the commune of that name.

He had neither father nor mother; he had no guardian save the procureur-impérial; he was alone in the world, and owed no account of himself to any one; society was to him a harsh stepdame, and he showed no mercy in his dealings with society, knew no guide but his own interests, found all means of success permissible. The Norman, armed with these dangerous capacities, combined with his desire to succeed the crabbed faults for which the natives of his province are, rightly or wrongly, blamed. Beneath his insinuating manner there was a contentious spirit; he was a most formidable antagonist —a blustering litigant, disputing another's least rights audaciously, while he never yielded a point himself. He had time on his side, and wearied out his opponent by his inflexible pertinacity. His principal merits were those of the Scapins of old comedy; he possessed their fertility of resource, their skill in sailing near the wind, their itch to seize on what seems good to have and hold. Indeed, he meant to apply to his poverty a motto which the Abbé Terray applied in statecraft; he would make a clean record by turning honest later on.

He was endowed with strenuous energy, with the military intrepidity which demands good deeds or bad indifferently of everybody, justifying his demand by the theory of personal interest; he was bound to succeed; he had too great a scorn of human nature; he believed too firmly that all men have their price; he was too little troubled by scruples as to the choice of means, when all were alike permissible; his eyes were too fixedly set upon the success and wealth that should purchase absolution for a system of morals which worked thus not to be successful.

Such a man, between the convict's prison on the one hand, and millions upon the other, must of necessity become vindictive, domineering, swift in his decisions, a

dissembling Cromwell scheming to cut off the head of probity. A light, mocking wit concealed the depth of his character; mere shopman though he was, his ambition knew no bounds; he had comprehended society in one glance of hatred, and said to himself, 'You are in my power.' He had vowed that he would not marry before he was forty years old. He kept his word with himself.

As to Ferdinand's outward appearance, he was a slim, well-shaped young fellow, with adaptable manners that enabled him at need to take any tone through the whole gamut of society. At first sight his weasel face was not displeasing; but after more observation, you detected the strange expressions which are visible on the surface of those who are not at peace with themselves, or who hear at times the warning voice of conscience. His hard, high colour glowed under the soft Norman skin. There was a furtive look in the wall-eyes, lined with silver leaf, which grew terrible when they were fixed full on his victim. His voice was husky, as if he had been speaking for long. The thin lips were not unpleasing, but the sharply-pointed nose and slightly-rounded forehead revealed a defect of race. Indeed, the colouring of his hair, which looked as if it had been dyed black, indicated the social half-breed, who had his cleverness from a dissolute great lord, his low ideas from the peasant girl, the victim of seduction; who owed his knowledge to an incomplete education; whose vices were those of the waif and stray.

Birotteau learned, to his unbounded amazement, that his assistant went out very elegantly arrayed, came in very late, and went to balls at bankers' and notaries' houses. These habits found no favour with César. To his way of thinking, a shopman should study the ledgers, and think of nothing but the business. The perfumer had no patience with folly. He spoke gently to du Tillet about wearing such fine linen, about visiting cards, which bore the name *F. du Tillet*—

manners and customs which, according to his commercial jurisprudence, should be confined to the fashionable world.

But Ferdinand had established himself in this house to play Tartuffe to Birotteau's Orgon; he paid court to Mme. César, tried to seduce her, and gauging his employer with appalling quickness, judged him as his wife had previously judged. Du Tillet only said what he meant to say, and was both reserved and discreet; but he unveiled opinions of mankind and views of life in a fashion that dismayed a timorous, conscientious woman, who thought it a sin to do the slightest wrong to her neighbour. In spite of the tact which Mme. Birotteau employed, du Tillet felt her contempt for him; and Constance, to whom Ferdinand had written several amorous epistles, soon noticed a change in the manners of her assistant. He began to behave presumptuously, to give others the impression that there was an understanding between them. Without informing her husband of her private reasons, she recommended him to dismiss the man, and Birotteau was of his wife's opinion on this head. Du Tillet's dismissal was resolved upon; but one evening, on the Saturday before he gave notice, Birotteau balanced his books, as he was wont to do every month, and found that he was three thousand francs short. He was in terrible consternation. It was not so much the actual loss that affected him as the suspicion that hung over his three assistants and the servant, the errand-boy, and the workmen. On whom was he to lay the blame? Mme. Birotteau was never away from the cash desk. The book-keeper, who lodged in the house, was a young man of eighteen, Popinot by name, a nephew of M. Ragon, and honesty itself. Indeed, on Popinot's own showing, the money was missing, for the cash did not agree with the balance. Husband and wife agreed to say nothing, and to watch every one in the house.

Monday came, and their friends came to spend the

evening. Every family in this set entertained in turn. While they played at *bouillotte*, Roguin the notary put down on the table some old louis-d'or which Mme. César had taken some days before of a bride, Mme. d'Espart.

'Have you been robbing the poor-box?' asked the perfumer, laughing.

Roguin said that he had won the money of du Tillet at a banker's house on the previous evening, and du Tillet bore him out in this without a blush. As for the perfumer, he turned crimson. When the visitors had gone, and Ferdinand was about to go to bed, Birotteau called him down into the shop, on pretence of business to discuss.

'We are three thousand francs short in the cash, du Tillet,' the good man said, 'and I cannot suspect anybody. The matter of the old louis-d'or seems to be too much against you to be passed over entirely, so we will not go to bed till we have found out the mistake, for, after all, it can be nothing but a mistake. Very likely you took the louis on account of your salary.'

Du Tillet owned to having taken the louis. The perfumer thereupon opened the ledger; the assistant's account had not yet been debited with the sum.

'I was in a hurry. I ought to have asked Popinot to enter it,' said Ferdinand.

'Quite true,' said Birotteau, disconcerted by this off-hand coolness. The Norman had taken the measure of the good folk among whom he had come with a view to making his fortune.

The perfumer and his assistant spent the night in checking the books, the worthy merchant knowing all the while that it was trouble thrown away. As he came and went he slipped three bank-notes of a thousand francs each into the safe, pressing them between the side of the drawer and the groove in the safe; then he pretended to be tired out, seemed to be fast asleep, and

snored. Du Tillet awakened him in triumph, and showed exaggerated delight over the discovery of the mistake.

The next morning Birotteau scolded little Popinot and Mme. César in public, and waxed wrathful over their carelessness.

A fortnight later, Ferdinand du Tillet entered a stock-broker's office. The perfumery trade did not suit him, he said ; he wanted to study banking. At the same time, he spoke of Mme. César in a way that gave the impression that motives of jealousy had procured his dismissal.

A few months later du Tillet came to see his late employer, and asked him to be his surety for twenty thousand francs, to complete the guarantees required in a matter which was to put him in the way of making his fortune. Seeing Birotteau's surprise at this piece of effrontery, du Tillet scowled and asked the perfumer whether he had no confidence in him. Matifat and two men with whom Birotteau did business were there at the time ; his indignation did not escape them, though he controlled his anger in their presence. Perhaps du Tillet had returned to honesty ; a gambling debt or some woman in distress might have been at the root of that error of his ; and the fact that an honest man publicly declined to have anything to do with him might launch a man, still young, and perhaps penitent, on a career of crime and misfortune. The angel of mercy took up the pen and set his signature on du Tillet's papers, saying as he did so that he was heartily glad to do a small service for a lad who had been very useful to him. The colour came into the good man's face as he told that kindly lie. Du Tillet could not meet his eyes, and doubtless at that moment vowed an eternal enmity, the truceless hate that the angels of darkness bear the angels of light.

Du Tillet kept his balance so skilfully upon the tight rope of speculation, that he was always fashionably dressed, and was apparently rich long before he was

rich in reality. When he set up a cabriolet he never put it down again; he held his own in the lofty spheres where pleasure and business are mingled, among the Turcarets of the epoch for whom the crush-room of the Opéra is a branch of the Stock Exchange.

Thanks to Mme. Roguin, whom he had met among the Birotteaus' circle, he became rapidly known in high financial regions. Ferdinand du Tillet had attained a prosperity in nowise delusive; he was on an excellent footing with the firm of Nucingen, to whom Roguin had introduced him; and he had not been slow to secure the Keller connection, and to make friends among the upper banking world. Nobody knew where the young fellow found the vast capital which he could command, but they set down his luck to his intelligence and honesty.

The Restoration made a personage of César Birotteau, and, in the vortex of political crises, he not unnaturally forgot these two cross events in his household. The tenacity with which he had held to his opinions—for though since his wound it had been a strictly passive tenacity, he still held to his principles for decency's sake—had brought him patronage in high quarters, precisely because he had asked for nothing. He received an appointment as major in the National Guard, though he did not so much as know a single word of command.

In 1815 Napoleon, inimical as ever to Birotteau, ejected him from his post. During the Hundred Days, Birotteau became the *bête noire* of the Liberals in his quarter; for party feeling began to run high in that year among the commercial class, who hitherto had been unanimous in voting for peace for business reasons.

After the second Restoration, the Royalist Government found it necessary to manipulate the municipal body. The prefect wanted to transform Birotteau into a mayor, but, thanks to his wife, the perfumer accepted the less conspicuous position of deputy-mayor. His modesty added not a little to his reputation, and brought him the

friendship of the mayor, M. Flamet de la Billardière. Birotteau, who had seen him at the *Queen of Roses* in the days when Royalist plotters used to meet at Ragon's shop, suggested his name to the Prefect of the Seine, who consulted the perfumer on the choice. M. and Mme. Birotteau were never forgotten in the mayor's invitations, and Mme. Birotteau often asked for charitable subscriptions at Saint-Roch in good society.

La Billardière warmly supported Birotteau when it was proposed to distribute the Crosses awarded to the municipal body; when names were being weighed, he laid stress upon César's wound received at Saint-Roch, on his attachment to the Bourbons, and on the respect in which Birotteau was held. So the minister who, while he endeavoured to undo the work of Napoleon, was wishful to make creatures of his own, and to secure partisans for the Bourbons from the ranks of commerce, and among men of art and science, included Birotteau in the list of those to be distinguished.

This favour, together with the glory which César already shed around him in his Arrondissement, put him in a position that was bound to magnify the ideas of a man who had met hitherto with nothing but success; and when the mayor told him of the approaching distinction, it was the final argument which urged the perfumer into the speculation which he had just disclosed to his wife; for it opened up a way of quitting the perfumery trade, and of rising to the upper ranks of the Parisian bourgeoisie.

Cesar was forty years old. Hard work at his factory had set one or two premature wrinkles in his face, and slightly silvered the long bushy hair, on which the constant pressure of his hat had impressed a glossy ring. The outlines of his hair described five points on the forehead, which told a story of simplicity of life. There was nothing alarming about the bushy eyebrows, for the blue eyes, with their clear, straightforward expression, were

in keeping with the honest man's brow. His nose, broken at his birth, and blunt at the tip, gave him the astonished look of the typical Parisian cockney. His lips were very thick, his chin heavy and straight. It was a high-coloured face with square outlines, and a peculiar disposition of the wrinkles,—altogether it was of the ingenuous, shrewd peasant type; and his evident physical strength, his sturdy limbs, broad shoulders, and big feet, all denoted the countryman transported to Paris. The large hands, covered with hair, the creases in the plump finger-joints, and broad, square-shaped nails at the tips, would alone have attested his origin if there had not been signs of it about his whole person.

He always wore the bland smile with which a shopkeeper welcomes a customer; but this smile, assumed for business purposes in his case, was the outward and visible expression of inward content, and reflected the serenity of a kindly soul. His distrust of his species was strictly confined to the business; he parted company with his shrewdness as he came away from the Exchange or shut his ledger. Suspicion for him was one of the exigencies of business, like his printed bill-heads.

There was a comical mixture of assurance, fatuity, and good-nature in his face, which gave it a certain character of its own, and redeemed it, to some extent, from the vapid uniformity of Parisian bourgeois countenances. But for that expression of artless wonder and trustfulness, people would have stood too much in awe of him; it was thus that he paid his quota of absurdity that put him on a footing of equality with his kind.

It was a habit of his to cross his hands behind him while speaking; and when he meant to say something particularly civil or striking, he gradually raised himself on tiptoe once or twice, and came down heavily upon his heels, as if to emphasise his remark. Sometimes in the height of a discussion he would suddenly swing himself round, take a step or two as if in search of objections, and

then turn abruptly upon his opponent. He never interrupted anybody, and not seldom fell a victim to his finer punctilious observance of good manners, for others did not scruple to take the words out of his mouth, and when the worthy man came away he had been unable to put in a word.

In his wide experience of business he had acquired habits which others sometimes described as a mania. For instance, if a bill had not been met, he would put it in the hands of the process-server, and gave himself no further trouble about it, save to receive the capital, interest, and court expenses. The matter might drive the customer into bankruptcy, and then César went no further. He never attended a meeting of creditors; his name never appeared in any list; he kept his claims. This system, together with an implacable contempt for bankrupts, had been handed down to him by old M. Ragon, who, after a long commercial experience, had come to the conclusion that the meagre and uncertain dividend paid under the circumstances was a very poor return for the time wasted in law proceedings, and held that he could spend his time to better purpose than in running about after excuses for dishonesty.

'If the bankrupt is an honest man, and makes his way again, he will pay you,' M. Ragon was wont to say. 'If he has nothing, and is simply unfortunate, what is the good of tormenting him? And if he is a rogue, you will get nothing in any case. If you have a name for being hard on people, they will not try to make terms with you; and so long as they can pay at all, you are the man whom they will pay.'

César kept his appointments punctually; he would wait for ten minutes, and nothing would induce him to stay any longer, a characteristic which was a cause of punctuality in others who had to do with him.

His dress was in keeping with his appearance and habits. No power on earth would have induced him to

resign the white lawn neck-cloths with drooping ends, embroidered by his wife or daughter. His white drill waistcoats, adorned with a double row of buttons, descended low upon his prominent abdomen, for Birotteau was inclined to corpulence. He wore blue breeches, black silk stockings, and walking-shoes adorned with ribbon bows that were apt to come unfastened. Out of doors his too ample green overcoat and broad-brimmed hat gave him a somewhat Quakerly appearance. On Sunday evenings he wore a coat of chestnut-brown cloth, with long tails and ample skirts, and black silk breeches; the corners of the inevitable waistcoat were turned down a little to display the pleated shirt-front beneath, and there were gold buckles on his shoes. Until the year 1819 his person was further adorned by two parallel lines of watch-chain, but he only wore the second when in full dress.

Such was César Birotteau—a worthy soul, from whom the mysterious powers that preside at the making of man had withheld the faculty of seeing life or politics as a whole, and the capacity of rising above the social level of the lower middle class; in all things he was destined to follow in the ruts of the old road; he had caught his opinions like an infection, and he put them in practice without examining into them. But if he was blind, he was a good man; if he was not very clever, he was deeply religious, and his heart was pure. In that heart there shone but one love, the light of his life and its motive-power; for his desire to rise in the world, like the meagre knowledge that he had learned in it, had its source in his love for his wife and daughter.

As for Mme. César, at that time, at the age of thirty-seven, she so exactly resembled the Venus of Milo, that when the Duc de Rivière sent the beautiful statue to France, all her acquaintance recognised the likeness. A few short months, and trouble, so swiftly spread its sallow tinge over the dazzling fairness of her face, so ruthlessly darkened and hollowed the blue-veined circles

in which the beautiful hazel eyes were set, that she came to look like an aged Madonna; for in the wreck of her beauty she never lost her sweet ingenuousness, though there was a sad expression in the clear eyes; and it was impossible not to see in her a still beautiful woman, staid in her demeanour, and full of dignity. Moreover, during this ball of César's planning, her beauty was to shine forth radiantly for the last time to the admiration of beholders.

Every life has its apogee; there is a time in every existence when active causes bring about exactly proportionate results. This high noon of life, when the vital forces are evenly balanced and put forth in all the glory of their strength, is common not only to organic life; you will find it even in the history of cities and nations and institutions and ideas, in commerce, and in every kind of human effort, for, like noble families and dynasties, these too have their birth and rise and fall.

How comes it that this argument of waxing and waning is applied so inexorably to everything throughout the system of things?—to death as to life; for in times of pestilence, death runs his course, abates, returns again, lies dormant. Who knows but that our globe itself is a rocket somewhat longer lived than other fireworks?

History, telling over and over again the reasons of the rise and fall of all that has been in the world in the past, might be a warning to man that there is a moment when the active play of all his faculties must cease; but neither conquerors, nor actors, nor women, nor writers heed the wholesome admonition. César Birotteau, who should have looked upon himself as having reached the apogee of his career, mistook the summit for the starting-point. He did not know the reason of the downfalls of which history is full; nay, neither kings nor peoples have made any effort to engrave in imperishable characters the causes of the catastrophes of which the history

of royal and of commercial houses affords such conspicuous examples. Why should not pyramids be reared anew to put us constantly in mind of the immutable law which should govern the affairs of nations as well as of individuals: *When the effect produced is no longer in direct relation with nor in exact proportion to the cause, disorganisation sets in?* And yet—these monuments are all about us—in legends, in the stones that cry out to us of a past, and bear perpetual record to the freaks of a stubborn Fate whose hand sweeps away our illusions, and makes it clear to us that the greatest events resolve themselves at last into an Idea, and the 'Tale of Troy' and the 'Story of Napoleon' are poems and nothing more.

Would that this story might be the Epic of the Bourgeoisie; there are dealings of Fate with man which inspire no voice, because they lack grandeur, yet are even for that very reason immense: for this is not the story of an isolated soul, but of a whole nation of sorrows.

César as he dropped off to sleep feared that his wife might bring forward some peremptory objection in the morning, and laid it upon himself to wake betimes and settle everything. As soon as it grew light, he rose noiselessly, leaving his wife asleep, dressed quickly, and went down into the shop just as the boy was taking down the numbered shutters. Birotteau, finding himself in solitary possession, stood waiting in the doorway for the assistants, watching critically meanwhile the way in which Raguet the errand boy discharged his duties, for Birotteau was an old hand. The weather was magnificent in spite of the cold.

'Popinot, fetch your hat and your walking shoes, and tell M. Célestin to come down; you and I will go to the Tuileries and have a little talk together,' said he, when Anselme came.

Popinot, that admirable foil to du Tillet, whom one of those happy chances which induce a belief in a protecting Providence had established in César's household, will

play so great a part in this story, that it is necessary to give a sketch of him here.

Mme. Ragon's maiden name was Popinot. She had two brothers. One of them, the youngest of the family, was at the present time a judge in the Tribunal of First Instance of the Seine. The older had gone into the wool-trade, had lost his patrimony, and died, leaving his only son to the Ragons and his brother the judge, who had no children. The child's mother had died at his birth.

Mme. Ragon had found this situation for her nephew, and hoped to see him succeed to Birotteau. Anselme Popinot (for that was his name) was short and club-footed, a dispensation common to Byron, Sir Walter Scott, and Talleyrand, lest others thus afflicted should be too much discouraged. He had the brilliant complexion covered with freckles which usually distinguishes red-haired people; but a clear forehead, eyes like agates streaked with grey, a pretty mouth, a pale face, the charm of youthful diffidence, and a want of confidence in himself, due to his physical deformity, aroused a kindly feeling towards him in others. We love the weak, and people felt interested in Popinot.

Little Popinot, as everybody called him, took after his family. They were people essentially religious, whose virtues were informed by intelligence, whose quiet lives were full of good deeds. So the child, brought up by his uncle the judge, united all the qualities pleasing in youth; he was a good and affectionate boy, a little bashful, but full of enthusiasm; docile as a lamb, but hard-working, faithful, and steady, endowed with all the virtues of a Christian in the early days of the Church.

When Popinot heard of the proposed walk to the Tuileries, the most unlooked-for remark that his awe-inspiring employer could have made at that time of day, his thoughts went to his own settlement in life, and thence all at once to Césarine, the real queen of roses,

the living sign of the house. He had fallen in love on his very first day in the shop, two months before du Tillet's departure. He was obliged to stop more than once on his way upstairs, his heart so swelled, and his pulses beat so hard.

In another moment he came down, followed by Célestin, the first assistant. Then Anselme and his employer set out without a word for the Tuileries.

Anselme Popinot was just twenty-one years of age; Birotteau had married at one-and-twenty, so Anselme saw no hindrance to his marriage with Césarine on that score. It was her beauty and her father's wealth that set enormous obstacles in the way of such ambitious wishes as his, but love grows with every up-leaping of hope; the wilder the hopes, the more he clung to them, and his longings grew the stronger for the distance between him and his love. Happy boy, who in a time when all and sundry are brought down to the same level, when every head is crowned with a precisely similar hat, can still contrive to create a distance between a perfumer's daughter and himself—the scion of an old Parisian family! And he was happy, in spite of his doubts and fears: every day of his life he sat next to Césarine at dinner; he set about his business with a zeal and enthusiasm that left no element of drudgery in his work; he did everything in the name of Césarine, and never wearied. At one-and-twenty devotion is food sufficient for love.

'He will be a merchant some of these days; he will get on,' César would say, speaking of Anselme to Mme. Ragon, and he would praise Anselme's activity in the filling-out department, extolling his quickness at comprehending the mysteries of the craft, relating how that, when goods were to be sent off in a hurry, Anselme would roll up his sleeves and work bare-armed at packing the cases and nailing down the lids, and the lame lad would do more than all the rest of them put together.

There was another serious obstacle in the way of the orphan's success. It was a well-known and recognised fact that Alexandre Crottat, Roguin's head-clerk, the son of a rich farmer of la Brie, hoped to marry Césarine; and there were other difficulties yet more formidable. In the depths of Popinot's heart there lay buried sad secrets which set a yet wider gulf between him and Césarine. The Ragons, on whom he might have counted, were in difficulties; the orphan boy was happy to take them his scanty salary to help them to eke out a living. But in spite of all these things, he hoped to succeed! More than once he had caught a glance from Césarine, and beneath her apparent pride he had dared to read a secret thought full of tender hopes in the depths of her blue eyes. So he worked on, set in a ferment by that gleam of hope, tremulous and mute, like all young men in a like case when life is breaking into blossom.

'Popinot,' the good man began, 'is your aunt quite well?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Somehow she has seemed to me to have an anxious look for some time past; can something have gone askew with them? Look here, my boy, you must not make a stranger of me, that am almost like one of the family, for I have known your Uncle Ragon these five-and-twenty years. When I first came to him, I was fresh from the country, and wore a pair of hobnailed boots. They call the place the Treasury Farm, but all I brought away with me was one gold louis which my godmother gave me, Madame the late Marquise d'Uxelles, who was related to le Duc and Mme. la Duchesse de Lenoncourt, who are among our patrons. So I always say a prayer every Sunday for her and all the family; and her niece, Mme. de Mortsauf, in Touraine, has all her perfumery from us. Customers are always coming to me through them. There is M. de Vandenesse, for

example, who spends twelve hundred francs with us every year. One ought to be grateful from prudence, if one is not grateful by nature; but I am a well-wisher to you, without an afterthought, and for your own sake.'

'Ah, sir, if you will allow me to say so, you had a level head.'

'No, my boy, no; that won't do everything. I don't say that my headpiece isn't as good as another's, but I stuck to honesty through thick and thin; I was steady, and I never loved any one but my wife. Love is a fine *vehicle*, a neat expression of M. de Villèle's yesterday at the Tribune.'

'Love!' cried Popinot. 'Oh! sir, do you——?'

'Stop a bit, stop a bit! There is old Roguin coming along the further side of the Place Louis XV. at eight o'clock in the morning. What can the old boy be about?' said César to himself, and he forgot Anselme Popinot and the hazel-nut oil.

His wife's theories came up in his memory, and instead of turning into the garden of the Tuileries, he walked on to meet the notary. Anselme followed at a distance, quite at a loss to explain the sudden interest which Birotteau appeared to take in a matter so unimportant; but very happy in the encouragement which he derived from his employer's little speech about hobnailed boots, and louis-d'or, and love.

Roguin, a tall, burly man, with a pimpled face, an almost bald forehead, and black hair, had not formerly been lacking in comeliness; and he had been young and ambitious once too, and from a mere clerk had come to be a notary; but now a keen observer would have read in his face the exhaustion and fatigue of a jaded seeker after pleasure. When a man plunges into the mire of excess, his face hardly escapes without a splash, and the lines engraved on Roguin's countenance and its florid colour were alike ignoble. Instead of the pure glow which suffuses the tissues of men of temperate life and imparts

a bloom of health, there was visible in Roguin the tainted blood inflamed by a strain against which the body rebelled. His nose was meanly turned up at the end, as is apt to be the case with those in whom humours taking this channel induce an internal affection, which a virtuous Queen of France innocently believed to be a misfortune common to the species, never having approached any man but the King sufficiently closely to discover her mistake. Roguin's efforts to disguise his infirmity by taking quantities of Spanish snuff served rather to aggravate the troublesome symptoms, which had been the principal cause of his misfortunes.

Is it not carrying flattery of society somewhat too far to paint individuals always in false colours, to conceal in certain cases the real causes of their vicissitudes, so often brought about by disease? Physical ills, in their moral aspects and the influences that they bring to bear on the mechanism of life, have perhaps been too much neglected hitherto by the historian of manners. Mme. César had rightly guessed the secret of Roguin's married life.

His wife, a charming girl, the only daughter of Chevrel, the banker, felt an unconquerable repugnance for the poor notary, which dated from the night of her marriage, and had been determined to demand an immediate divorce. But Roguin, too happy to have a wife who brought him five hundred thousand francs, to say nothing of her expectations, had implored her not to enter her plea, leaving her her liberty, and accepting all the consequences of such a compact. Mme. Roguin, mistress of the situation, treated her husband as a courtesan treats an elderly adorer. Roguin soon found his wife too dear, and, like many another Parisian, had a second establishment in the town. At first the expenditure did not exceed a moderate limit.

For a while Roguin found, at no great outlay, grisettes who were too glad of his protection; but at the end of three years he fell a prey to a violent sexagenarian

passion for one of the most magnificent creatures of the time, known as *La belle Hollandaise* in the calendars of prostitution, for she shortly afterwards fell back into that gulf, which her death made illustrious. One of Roguin's clients had formerly brought her to Paris from Bruges; and when, in 1815, political considerations forced him to fly, he made her over to the notary. Roguin had taken a little house in the Champs-Élysées for his enchantress; he had furnished it handsomely, and had allowed himself to be led by her, until he had squandered away his fortune to satisfy her extravagant whims.

The gloomy expression, which vanished from Roguin's countenance at the sight of his client, was connected with mysterious events, wherein lay the secret of du Tillet's rapid success. While du Tillet was still under Birotteau's roof, on the first Sunday which gave him an opportunity of observing how M. and Mme. Roguin were situated with regard to each other, his plans had undergone a change. His designs upon Mme. César had been subordinated to another purpose; he had meant to compel an offer of Césarine's hand as compensation for repulsed advances; but it cost him the less to give up this marriage since he had discovered that César was not rich, as he had believed. Then du Tillet played the spy on the notary, insinuated himself into his confidence, obtained an introduction to *La belle Hollandaise*, ascertained the terms on which she stood with Roguin, and learned that she was threatening to dismiss her adorer if he curtailed her extravagance. *La belle Hollandaise* was one of those scatterbrained creatures who take money without disturbing themselves as to how it was made, or how they come by it; women who would give a banquet with a parricide's crowns. She took no thought for the morrow, and was careless of yesterday. The future for her meant after dinner, and eternity lay between the present moment and the end of the month, even when she had bills to fall due. Du Tillet was delighted to find a first

lever to his hand, and began his campaign by obtaining a reduction from *La belle Hollandaise*, who agreed to solace Roguin's existence for thirty thousand francs instead of fifty thousand, a kind of service which sexagenarian passion rarely forgets.

At length, one night after deep potations, Roguin opened out his financial position to du Tillet in an after-supper confidence. His real estate was mortgaged to its full value under his wife's marriage settlement, and in his infatuation he had appropriated moneys deposited with him by his clients ; more than half the value of his practice had been embezzled in this way. When he had run through the rest, the unfortunate Roguin would blow his brains out, for he thought he should diminish the scandal of his failure by exciting the pity of the public. Du Tillet, listening, beheld success, rapid and assured, gleaming like a flash of lightning through the obscurity of drunkenness. He reassured Roguin, and repaid his confidence by persuading him to fire his pistols into the air.

'When a man of your calibre takes such risks upon himself,' said he, 'he ought not to flounder about like a fool ; he should set to work boldly.'

Du Tillet counselled Roguin to help himself to a large sum of money, and to intrust it to him (du Tillet) to speculate boldly with it on the Stock Exchange, or in some other enterprise among the hundreds that were being started at that speculative epoch. If the stroke was successful, the two of them should found a bank, speculate with the deposits, and with the profits the notary should satisfy his cravings. If the luck went against them, Roguin should go abroad, instead of killing himself, for his devoted du Tillet would be faithful to the last penny. It was a rope flung out to a drowning man, and Roguin did not see that the perfumer's salesman was fastening it round his neck.

Du Tillet, master of Roguin's secret, used it to establish his power over the wife, the husband, and the

mistress. Mme. Roguin, to whom he gave warning of a disaster, which she was far from suspecting, accepted du Tillet's assiduities, and then it was that the latter left the perfumer's shop, feeling that his future was secure. It was not difficult to persuade the mistress to risk a sum of money that in case of need she might not be obliged to go on the street. The wife looked into her affairs, and accumulated a small amount of capital, which she handed over to the man in whom her husband placed confidence, for at the outset the notary put a hundred thousand francs into the hands of his accomplice. Brought in this way into close contact with Mme. Roguin, du Tillet contrived to transform interest into affection, and to inspire a violent passion in that handsome woman. In his speculations on the Stock Exchange he naturally shared in the profits of his three associates, but this was not enough for him; he had the audacity to come to an understanding with an opponent, who refunded to him the amount of fictitious losses, for he played for his own hand as well as for his clients.

As soon as he had fifty thousand francs, he was sure of making a large fortune. He watched with the eagle's eye that was one of his characteristics, over the phases of political life in France; he speculated for a fall in the Funds during the campaign of France, and for a rise when the Bourbons came back.

Two months after the return of Louis XVIII., Mme. Roguin possessed two hundred thousand francs, and du Tillet a hundred thousand crowns. In the notary's eyes this young man was an angel; he had restored order in his affairs. But *La belle Hollandaise* fell a victim to a wasting complaint which nothing could cure, a virulent cancer called Maxime de Trailles, one of the late Emperor's pages. Du Tillet discovered the woman's real name from her signature to a document. It was Sarah Gobseck. Then he remembered that he had heard of a money-lender of the name of Gobseck; and, struck

by the coincidence, paid a visit to that aged discounter of bills, and providence of young men with prospects, to find out how this female relative's credit stood with him. The bill-broking Brutus proved inexorable where his grand-niece was concerned, but du Tillet himself managed to find favour in his eyes by posing as Sarah's banker with capital to invest. The Norman and the money-lender found each other congenial.

Gobseck wanted a clever young fellow who could look after a bit of business abroad for him just then. The return of the Bourbons had taken a State auditor by surprise. To this financier, wishful to stand well at Court, it had occurred that he might buy up the debts contracted by the Princes in Germany during the emigration. He offered the profits of the affair, which for him was purely a matter of policy, to any one who would advance the necessary money. Old Gobseck had no mind to disburse moneys over and above the market value of the debts, into which a shrewd representative must first examine. Money-lenders trust nobody; they must always have a guarantee; the occasion is omnipotent with them; they are ice when they have no need of a man, affable and obliging when he is likely to be useful. Du Tillet knew the immense part played, below the surface, in the Paris money market by Werbrust and Gigonnet, discount brokers of the Rue Saint-Denis and Rue Saint-Martin, and by Palma, a banker in the Faubourg Poissonnière, who was almost always associated with Gobseck. He therefore offered to pay down caution money, requiring on his own side a share in the profits of the transaction, and asking that these gentlemen should employ in the money-lending business the capital which he should deposit with them. In this way he secured supporters. Then he accompanied M. Clément Chardin des Lupeaulx on a trip to Germany during the Hundred Days, and came back with the Second Restoration, with some added

knowledge that should lead to success rather than with actual wealth. He had had an initiation into the secrets of one of the cleverest schemers in Paris ; he had won the goodwill of the man whom he had been set to watch ; a dexterous juggler had laid bare for him the springs of political intrigue and the rules of the game.

Du Tillet's intelligence was of the order which understands at half a word ; this journey formed him. On his return he found Mme. Roguin still faithful ; but the poor notary was expecting Ferdinand with quite as much impatience as his wife. *La belle Hollandaise* had ruined him again !

Du Tillet, questioning *La belle Hollandaise*, could not elicit from her an account that represented all the money which she had squandered. And then it was that he discovered the secret so carefully kept from him—Sarah Gobseck's infatuation for Maxime de Trailles, known at the very outset of his career of vice and debauchery for a political hanger-on of a kind indispensable to all good government, and for an insatiable gambler. After this discovery du Tillet understood old Gobseck's indifference to his grand-niece.

At this critical juncture, du Tillet the banker (for by this time he was a banker) strongly recommended Roguin to put by something for a rainy day ; to engage some of his richest clients in a business speculation, and then to keep back considerable sums out of the money paid over to him, in case he should be compelled to become a bankrupt in the course of a second career of speculation. After various rises and falls in the price of stocks, which brought luck only to du Tillet and Mme. Roguin, the notary's hour struck. He was insolvent, and thereupon, in his extremity, his closest friend exploited him, and du Tillet discovered that speculation in building land in the neighbourhood of the Madeleine. Naturally, one hundred thousand francs which Birotteau had deposited with Roguin until an investment should be

found for them, were paid over to du Tillet, who, bent upon compassing the perfumer's ruin, made Roguin understand that he ran less risk by ensnaring his own intimate friends in his toils.

'A friend,' said du Tillet, 'will not go all lengths even in anger.'

There are not many people at this present day who know how little land was worth per foot in the district of the Madeleine at this time; but the building lots must necessarily shortly be sold for more than their momentary depreciation, caused by the necessity of finding purchasers who would profit by the opportunity. Now it was du Tillet's idea to reap the benefit without keeping his money locked up in a lengthy speculation. In other words, he meant to kill the affair, so that a corpse which he knew how to resuscitate might be knocked down to him.

In such emergencies as this, the Gobsecks, Palmas, Werbrusts, and Gigonnets all lent each other a hand, but du Tillet did not know them well enough to ask them to help him; and, besides, he meant to hide his action in the matter so thoroughly that, while he steered the whole business, he might receive all the profits and none of the disgrace of the robbery. So he saw the necessity of one of those animated lay figures termed *men of straw* in commercial phrase. The man who had once before acted the part of a stock-jobber for him seemed to be a suitable tool to his hand, and he infringed the Divine rights by creating a man. Of a former commercial traveller, without a farthing on this earth, with no ability, no capacity save for empty rambling talk on all sorts of subjects, and but just sufficient wit to suffer himself to be drilled in a part and to play it without compromising the piece, and yet endowed with the rarest sense of honour—that is to say, a faculty for silently accepting the dishonour of his principal—of him, du Tillet made a banker, the originator and promoter

of commercial enterprises on the largest scale; him he metamorphosed into the head of the firm of Claparon.

Should the exigencies of du Tillet's affairs at any time demand a bankruptcy, it was to be Charles Claparon's fate to be delivered over to Jews and Pharisees, and Claparon knew it. Still, for the present, the scraps and pickings that fell to his share were an El Dorado for a poor devil who, when his chum du Tillet came across him, was sauntering along the Boulevards with no prospects beyond the two-franc piece in his pockets; so his friendship for and devotion to du Tillet, swelled by a gratitude that did not look to the future, and stimulated by the cravings of a dissolute and disreputable life, led him to say *Amen* to everything.

When he had once sold his honour, he saw that it was risked with so much prudence, that at length he came to have a sort of dog-like attachment for his old comrade du Tillet. Claparon was a very ugly performing poodle, but he was ready at any moment to make the leap of Curtius for his master.

In the present scheme Claparon was to represent one-half of the purchasers of the lots, as Birotteau represented the other half. Then the bills which Claparon would receive from Birotteau should be discounted by some money-lender, whose name du Tillet would borrow; so that when Roguin absconded with the rest of the purchase-money, Birotteau would be left on the brink of ruin. Du Tillet meant to direct the action of the assignees; there should be a forced sale of the building land, and du Tillet meant to be the purchaser; he would buy it for about half its value, and pay for it with Roguin's money and the dividend of the bankruptcy; so under different names he was in possession of the money paid down by the perfumer and his creditor to boot.

It was a prospect of a goodly share of the spoils that led Roguin to meddle in this scheme; but he had practically surrendered himself at discretion to a man

who could and did take the lion's part. It was impossible to bring du Tillet into a court of law, and the notary in a remote part of Switzerland, where he found beauties of a less expensive kind, was lucky to have a bone flung to him once a month or so.

The ugly scheme was no deliberate invention, no outcome of the broodings of a tragedian weaving a plot, but the result of circumstance. Hatred, unaccompanied by a desire for revenge, is as seed sown upon the granite rock: du Tillet swore to be revenged upon César Birotteau, and the prompting was one of the most natural things in the world; if it had been otherwise, there had been no quarrel between angels of darkness and the angels of light.

Du Tillet could not, without great inconvenience, murder the one man in Paris who knew that he had been guilty of petty theft; but he could sully his old master's name and crush him until his testimony was no longer admissible. For a long time past the thought of vengeance had been germinating in his mind; but it had come to nothing. The rush of life in Paris is so swift, and so full of stir, chance counts for so much in it, that even the most energetic haters do not look very far ahead; yet, on the other hand, if the constant ebb and flow is unfavourable to premeditated action, it affords excellent opportunities for carrying out projects that lurk in politic brains, clever enough to lie in wait for the chances that come with the tide. Du Tillet had had a dim inkling of the possibility of ruining César from the moment when Roguin first opened out his case to him; and he had not miscalculated.

Roguin, meanwhile, on the point of leaving his idol, drained the rest of the philtre from the broken cup, going daily to the Champs-Élysées, and returning home in the small hours. There were grounds, therefore, for Mme. César's suspicious theories. When a man has made up his mind to play such a part as du Tillet had assigned to Roguin, he perforce acquires the talents of a

great actor; he has the eyes of a lynx and the penetration of a seer; he finds ways of magnetising his dupe, so the notary had seen Birotteau long before Birotteau set eyes on him; and when he saw that he was recognised, he held out a hand while he was still at some distance.

'I have just been making the will of a great person who has not a week to live,' said he, with the most natural air in the world, 'but they have treated me like a village doctor—sent a carriage to fetch me, and let me go home afoot.'

A slight cloud of suspicion which had darkened the perfumer's brows cleared away at these words; but Roguin had noticed it, and took good care not to be the first to speak about the building land, for he meant to give his victim the finishing stroke.

'After a will come marriage-contracts,' said Birotteau; 'such is life. Ah! by the by, Roguin, old fellow, when do we make a match of it with the Madeleine, eh?' and he tapped the other on the chest. Among men, the best-conducted bourgeois will try to appear a bit of a rogue with the women.

'Well, it is to-day or never,' returned the notary with a diplomatic look. 'We are afraid that the affair will get noised abroad; already two of my richest clients want to go into the speculation, and are very keen about it. So you can take it or leave it. After twelve o'clock this morning I shall draw up the deeds, and until one o'clock it is open to you to join us if you choose. Good-bye. Xandrot made a rough draft of the documents for me last night, and I am about to read them through this very minute.'

'All right, the thing is settled, you have my word,' cried Birotteau, hurrying after the notary, and striking hands upon it. 'Take the hundred thousand francs that were to have been my daughter's portion.'

'Good,' said Roguin, as he walked away.

In the brief interval as Birotteau returned to young

Popinot he felt a sensation of feverish heat run through him, his diaphragm contracted, sounds rang in his ears.

'What is the matter, sir?' asked the assistant, looking at his employer's pale face.

'Ah, my boy, I have just concluded a big piece of business with a single word. No one in such a position can help feeling some emotion. You know all about it, however; and besides, I brought you here so that we could talk comfortably where no one will listen to us. Your aunt is pinched; what did she lose her money in? Tell me about it.'

'My uncle and aunt put their capital into M. Nucingen's bank, and were obliged to take over shares in the Worstchin mines in settlement of their claims; no dividends have been paid on them as yet, and at their time of life it is difficult to live on hope.'

'Then how do they live?'

'They have been so good as to accept my salary.'

'Good, Anselme, good,' said the perfumer, looking up with a tear in his eyes; 'you are worthy of the attachment I feel for you. And you shall be well rewarded for your application in my service.'

As he spoke, the merchant grew greater in his own estimation as well as in Popinot's eyes; a sense of his adventitious superiority was artlessly revealed in his homely and paternal way of speaking.

'What! Can you have guessed my passion for——?'

'For whom?' asked the perfumer.

'For Mademoiselle Césarine.'

'Boy!' cried Birotteau, 'you are very bold. But keep your secret carefully; I promise to forget it, and you shall go out of the house to-morrow. I don't blame you; the devil no! In your place I should have done just the same. She is so pretty.'

'Ah, sir!' cried the assistant, in such a perspiration that his shirt felt damp.

'This cannot be settled in a day, my boy. Césarine

is her own mistress, and her mother has her ideas. So keep yourself to yourself, wipe your eyes, hold your heart well in hand, and we will say no more about it. I should not blush to have you for a son-in-law. As the nephew of M. Popinot, judge of a Tribunal of First Instance, and as the Ragons' nephew, you have as good a right to make your way as another, but there are *ifs* and *buts* and *ands!* What a devil of a notion you have sprung upon me in the middle of a talk about business! There, sit you down on that bench, and business first and love affairs after.—Now, Popinot, is there mettle in you?' said Birotteau, looking at his assistant. 'Do you feel that you have courage enough to wrestle with those that are stronger than you? for a hand-to-hand fight, eh?'

'Yes, sir.'

'To keep up a long and dangerous combat——?'

'What is it?'

'To drive Macassar Oil from the field!' cried Birotteau, drawing himself up like one of Plutarch's heroes. 'We must not undervalue the enemy; he is strong, well intrenched, and formidable. Macassar Oil has been well pushed. It is a clever idea, and the shape of the bottles is out of the common. I had thoughts of a triangular bottle for this plan of mine, but after mature reflection, I am inclined for little blown glass flasks covered with wicker work; they would look mysterious, and the public like anything that tickles their curiosity.'

'It would cost a good deal,' said Popinot. 'Everything ought to be on the cheapest possible footing, so as to allow a heavy discount to the trade.'

'Right, my boy; those are sound principles of business. Bear in mind that Macassar Oil will show fight! 'Tis a specious thing; the name is attractive. It is put before the public as a foreign importation, and we, unluckily, are in our own country. Look here, Popinot, do you feel strong enough to do for Macassar? To begin with, you will oust it from the export trade; it seems that

Macassar really does come from the Indies, so it is more natural to send French goods to the Indians than to ship them back the stuff that they are supposed to send to us. So there's the export trade for you! But it will have to be fought out abroad, and all over the country; and Macassar Oil has been so well advertised, that it is no use blinking the fact that it has a hold; it is pushed everywhere, and the public are familiar with it.'

'I will do for it!' cried Popinot, with eyes on fire.

'And how?' returned Birotteau. 'It is like the impetuosity of these young people! Just hear me out.'

Anselme looked like a soldier presenting arms to a Marshal of France.

'I have invented an oil, Popinot, an oil which invigorates the scalp, stimulates the growth of the hair, and preserves its colour—an oil for both sexes. The essence should have no less success than the Pâte and the Lotion, but I do not want to exploit the secret by myself; I am thinking of retiring from business. I want *you*, my boy, to bring out the *Comagen*—from the Latin word *coma*, which means hair (so M. Alibert, physician to the King, told me). In *Bérenice*, Racine's tragedy too, there is a king of Comagène, a lover of the beautiful queen who was so famous for her hair; no doubt it was out of compliment to her that he called his kingdom Comagène. How clever these great men of genius are! they descend to the smallest details.'

Little Popinot listened to these incongruities, evidently meant for his benefit, who had had some education, and yet kept his countenance.

'Anselme,' continued Birotteau, 'I have cast my eyes on you as the founder of a wholesale druggist's business in the Rue des Lombards. I will be a sleeping-partner, and find you the capital to start it with. When we have begun with the Comagen, we will try essence of vanilla and essence of peppermint. In short, by degrees we will go into the drug trade and revolutionise it, by

selling articles in a concentrated form instead of the raw products. Are you satisfied, ambitious young man?'

Anselme was so overcome that he could not reply, but his tear-filled eyes made answer for him. It seemed to him that this offer was the outcome of a fatherly indulgence which said, 'Deserve Césarine by earning wealth and respect.'

'I too will succeed, sir,' he said at last, taking Birotteau's emotion for astonishment.

'Just what I was at your age,' cried the perfumer; 'those were just the very words I used! Whether you have my daughter or no, at any rate you will have a fortune. Well, my boy, what has come to you?'

'Let me hope that by gaining the one I may win the other.'

'I do not forbid you to hope, my dear fellow,' said Birotteau, touched by Anselme's tone.

'Very well, sir; may I begin to look out at once for a shop, so as to begin as soon as possible?'

'Yes, my boy. To-morrow we will shut ourselves up in the factory. You might look in at Livingston's on your way to the Rue des Lombards, and see if my hydraulic press will be in working order by to-morrow. To-night, at dinner-time, we will go to see that great man, kind M. Vauquelin, and ask him about this. He has been investigating the composition of hair quite lately, trying to find out its colouring matter, and where it comes from, and what hair is made of.—It all lies in that, Popinot. You shall know my secret, and all that remains to do is to exploit it intelligently.—Look in at Pieri Bérard's before you go round to Livingston.—My boy, M. Vauquelin's disinterestedness is one of the great troubles of my life. You cannot get him to accept anything. Luckily, I found out from Chiffreville that he wanted a Madonna at Dresden, engraved by one Müller, and after two years of inquiry for it in Germany, Bénard

has found a copy at last—a proof before letters on India paper; it cost fifteen hundred francs, my boy. And now to-day our benefactor shall see it in the antechamber when he comes to the door with us; framed, of course, you will make sure of that. So in that way we shall recall ourselves to his memory, my wife and I; for as to gratitude, we have put his name in our prayers every day these sixteen years. For my part, I shall never forget him; but, you know, Popinot, these men of science are so deep in their work, that they forget everything, wife and children, and those they have done a good turn to. As for the like of us, our little intelligence permits us to have warm hearts at any rate. That is some comfort for not being a great man. These gentlemen at the Institute are all brain, as you will see; you will never come across one of them in a church. There is M. Vauquelin, always in his study when he isn't in his laboratory; I like to believe though that he thinks of God while he analyses His works.—This is the understanding: I am to find the capital, I will put you in possession of my secret, and we will divide the profits equally, so there will be no need to draw up a deed. Good success to us both! We will tune our pipes. Off with you, my boy; I have affairs of my own to see after. One moment, Popinot; in three weeks time I am going to give a grand ball, have a suit of clothes made, and come to it like a merchant already in a good way of business——'

This last piece of kindness touched Popinot so much that he grasped César's large hand in his and kissed it. The good man's confidence had flattered the lover, and a man in love is capable of anything.

'Poor fellow!' said Birotteau, as he watched his assistant hurrying across the gardens of the Tuileries, 'if Césarine only cared about him! But he limps, his hair is the colour of a basin, and girls are such queer things! I can scarcely believe that Césarine . . . And then her

mother would like to see her a notary's wife. Alexandre Crottat would make her a rich woman; money makes anything endurable, while there is no happiness that will stand the test of poverty. After all, I have made up my mind that my girl shall be mistress of herself, so that she stops short of folly.'

Birotteau's next-door neighbour, Cayron by name, was a dealer in umbrellas, sunshades, and walking sticks. He came from Languedoc, his business was not doing well, and César had helped him several times. Cayron asked nothing better than to contract his limits, and to effect a proportionate saving in house rent by giving up two first-floor rooms to the wealthy perfumer.

'Well, neighbour,' said Birotteau familiarly as he entered the umbrella shop, 'my wife consents to the enlargement of our place. If you like, we will go round and see M. Molineux at eleven o'clock.'

'My dear M. Birotteau,' returned he of the umbrella shop, 'I have never asked anything for the concession on my part, but you know that a good man of business ought to turn everything to money.'

'The deuce!' cried the perfumer; 'I have no money to throw away, and I am waiting to know if my architect thinks the thing feasible. "Before you settle anything," so he said, "we must know whether the floors are on a level; and then we must have M. Molineux's leave to make an opening in the wall, and is it a party wall?" And after that I shall have to turn the staircase in my house, so as to alter the landing and have the whole place level from end to end. There will be a lot of expense, and I don't want to ruin myself.'

'Ah, sir,' cried the Languedocien, 'when *you* are ruined, heaven and earth will come together and have a family.'

Birotteau stroked his chin, raised himself on tiptoe, and came down again.

'Besides,' Cayron went on, 'I only ask you to take

this paper of me——' and he held out a little statement for five thousand francs and sixteen bills.

'Ah!' said the perfumer, turning them over, 'all for small amounts, at two months and three months——'

'Take them of me, and don't charge me more than six per cent.,' pleaded the umbrella dealer humbly.

'Am I a Jew?' asked the perfumer reproachfully.

'Goodness, sir, I took them to du Tillet that used to be your assistant, and he would not have them at any price; he wanted to know how much I would consent to lose, no doubt.'

'I know none of these signatures,' said the perfumer.

'Well, we have funny names in the cane and umbrella trade; they are hawkers.'

'Well, well; I do not say that I will take the lot, but I might manage to take all at the shortest dates.'

'Don't leave me to run after those horse-leeches that drain us of the best part of the profits, for a thousand francs at four months; take the lot, sir! I do so little discounting, that no one gives me credit; that is the death of us poor retailers in a small way.'

'Well, well, I will take your little bills. Celestin shall settle it with you. Be ready at eleven.—Here comes my architect, M. Grindot,' added the perfumer, as he saw the young man whom he had met by appointment at M. de la Billardière's house on the previous evening.—'Unlike most men of talent, you are punctual, sir,' said César, in his most genteel manner.

'If punctuality—in the phrase of a king who was a clever man as well as a great statesman—is the courtesy of kings, it is no less the fortune of architects. Time—time is money; most of all for you artists. Architecture combines all the other arts, I permit myself to say. We will not go through the shop,' he added, as he showed the way to the sham carriage entrance.

Four years ago M. Grindot had taken the *Grand Prix*

d'Architecture; and now he had just returned from a three years' sojourn in Rome at the expense of the State. While he was in Italy the young artist had thought of his art; in Paris he turned his attention to money-making. Governments alone can give the necessary millions to erect public buildings and monuments to an architect's enduring fame; and it is so natural, when fresh from Rome, to take one's self for a Fontaine or a Percier, that every ambitious young architect has a leaning towards Ministerialism; so the subsidised Liberal, metamorphosed into a Royalist, sought to find patrons in power; and when a *Grand Prix* conducts himself after this fashion, his comrades call him a sycophant.

Two courses lay open to the youthful architect—he might serve the perfumer or make as much as he could out of him. But Birotteau the deputy-mayor; Birotteau, the future possessor of half of that building estate near the Madeleine, where a quarter full of handsome houses was sure to be built sooner or later, was a man worth humouring, so Grindot sacrificed present gain to future opportunities. Patiently he listened to the plans, ideas, and vain repetitions of this shopkeeping Philistine, the artist's butt and laughing-stock, and the particular object of his scorn, and followed the perfumer about his house, bowing respectfully to his ideas. When Birotteau had said all that he had to say, the young architect tried to give a summary of his own views.

'You have three windows looking out upon the street in your own house,' he said, 'as well as the window that is wasted on the stairs and required for the landing. To these four windows you add two on the same floor in the next house, by turning the staircase so that you can walk on level from one end to the other on the side nearest the street.'

'You have understood me exactly,' said the amazed perfumer.

'To carry out your plan, we shall have to light the

new staircase from above, and contrive a porter's lodge in the plinth.'

'Plinth?'

'Yes; the part of the wall under the——'

'I see, sir.'

'As to your rooms, and their arrangements and decoration, give me *carte-blanche*. I should like to make them worthy——'

'Worthy! You have said the very word, sir.'

'How long can you give me to carry out this scheme of decoration?'

'Twenty days.'

'What are you prepared to put down for the workmen?'

'Well, what are the repairs likely to mount up to?'

'An architect can estimate the cost of a new building almost to a centime,' said the other; 'but as I have not undertaken a *bourgeois* job as yet (pardon me, sir, the word slipped out), I ought to tell you beforehand that it is impossible for me to give estimates for alterations and repairs. In a week's time I might be able to make a rough guess. Put your confidence in me; you shall have a charming staircase lighted from above, and a pretty vestibule, and in the plinth——'

'The plinth again!'

'Do not be anxious. I will find room for a little porter's lodge. The alteration and decoration of your rooms will be a labour of love. Yes, sir, I am thinking of art and not of making money. Above all things, if I am to succeed, I must be talked about, must I not? So, in my opinion, the best way is not to haggle with tradesmen, but to obtain a good effect cheaply.'

'With such ideas, young man,' Birotteau said patronisingly, 'you will succeed.'

'So you will yourself arrange with the bricklayers, painters, locksmiths, carpenters, and cabinet-makers; and I, for my part, undertake to check their accounts. You

will simply agree to pay me a fee of two thousand francs; it will be money well laid out. Put the whole place into my hands by twelve o'clock to-morrow, and tell me whom you mean to employ.'

'What is it likely to cost at first sight?' asked Birotteau.

'Ten to twelve thousand francs,' said Grindot, 'without counting the furniture; for, of course, you will refurnish the rooms. Will you give me the address of your carpet manufacturer? I ought to come to an understanding with him about the colours, so as to have a harmonious unity.'

'M. Braschon in the Rue Saint-Antoine has my order,' said the perfumer, assuming a ducal air.

The architect made a note of the address on one of those little tablets which are unmistakably a pretty woman's gift.

'Well,' said Birotteau, 'I leave it all to you, sir. Still, wait until I have arranged to take over the lease of the two rooms next door, and obtained permission to make an opening through the wall.'

'Send me a note this evening,' said the architect. 'I must spend the night in drawing plans. We architects would rather work for a city merchant than for the King of Prussia, that is to say, as far as our own taste is concerned. In any case, I will set about taking measurements, the height of the rooms, the dimensions of the door and window embrasures, and the size of the windows.'

'It must be finished by the date I have given, or it is no good.'

'It certainly must,' returned the architect. 'The men shall work day and night, and we will employ processes for drying the paint; but do not let the builders swindle you, make them quote beforehand, and have the agreement in writing.'

'Paris is the only place in the world where one can

make such strokes of the wand,' said Birotteau, indulging in a flourish worthy of some Asiatic potentate in the *Arabian Nights*.—'Do me the honour of coming to my ball, sir. All men of talent do not feel the contempt for trade which some heap upon it; and I expect you will meet one scientific man of the highest rank—M. Vauquelin of the Institute!—besides M. de la Billardière, M. le Comte de Fontaine, M. Lebas, a judge, and President of the Tribunal of Commerce; and several magistrates, M. le Comte de Granville of the Court Royal, and M. Popinot of the Court of First Instance, M. Camusot of the Tribunal of Commerce, and his father-in-law M. Cardot. . . . Perhaps, even M. le Duc de Lenoncourt, first Gentleman of the Bed-chamber. It is a gathering of my friends, quite as much in honour of—er—the liberation of the soil—as to celebrate my —promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honour.'

Grindot's gesture was peculiar.

'Possibly—I have deserved this—signal mark of royal —favour by the discharge of my functions at the Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for the Bourbons on the steps of Saint-Roch's Church on the 13th Vendémiaire, when I was wounded by Napoleon. These claims to——'

Constance, in morning dress, came out of Césarine's bedroom, where she had been dressing; her first glance stopped her husband's fervid eloquence; he cast about for some everyday phrase which should modestly convey the tidings of the glory awaiting him on the morrow.

'Here, *mimi*, this is M. *de* Grindot, a distinguished young man of great talent.—This gentleman is the architect whom M. de la Billardière recommended; he will superintend our little alterations here.'

The perfumer placed himself so that his wife could not see him, and put his finger on his lips as he uttered the word *little*. The architect understood.

'Constance, this gentleman will take the dimensions

of the rooms.—Let him do it, dear,' said Birotteau, and he whisked out into the street.

'Will it cost a great deal?' Constance asked the architect.

'No, Madame; six thousand francs, roughly speaking——'

'Roughly speaking!' cried Mme. Birotteau. 'Sir, I beg of you not to begin without an estimate, and to do nothing until a contract has been signed. I know the way of those gentlemen the builders—six thousand means twenty thousand. We are not in a position to squander money. I beg of you, sir, although my husband is certainly master in his own house, to leave him time to think this over.'

'Monsieur told me, Madame, that he must have the rooms finished in twenty days; if we make a delay, you may incur the expense without obtaining the result.'

'There is expense and expense,' said the fair mistress of the *Queen of Roses*.

'Eh! madame; is it so very glorious, do you think, for an architect who would like to erect public monuments to superintend alterations in a private house? I only undertook the little commission to oblige M. de la Billardière, and if you are alarmed——'

He made as if he would withdraw.

'Well, well, sir,' said Constance, going back to her room. Once there, she hid her head on her daughter's shoulder.—'My child,' she cried, 'your father is ruining himself! He has engaged an architect who wears moustaches and a *royale* on his chin, and talks about erecting public monuments! He will fling the house out of the windows to build us a Louvre. César is always in a hurry when there is anything crazy to be done; he only told me about the plan last night, and he is setting about it this morning.'

'Bah! mamma, never mind papa; Providence has always taken care of you,' said Césarine, putting her

arms about her mother. Then she went to the piano, to show the architect that a perfumer's daughter was no stranger to the fine arts.

When the architect came into the room, he was surprised by Césarine's beauty, and stood almost dumbfounded. For the artist saw before him Césarine just come from her little room, in her loose morning-gown, fresh and blooming with the freshness and the bloom of eighteen years, blue-eyed, and slender, and fair-haired. Youth gave the elasticity (so rare in Paris) which lends firmness to the most delicate tissues; youth tinted the blue network of veins throbbing beneath the transparent skin with the colour adored by painters. For though she lived in the relaxing atmosphere of a Parisian shop, where the fresh air can scarcely penetrate, and the sunlight seldom comes, the outdoor life of Roman Trasteverine could not have been a more successful beautifier than Césarine's manner of living. Her thick hair grew erect like her father's, and being dressed high, afforded a view of a well-set neck among a shower of curls—the elaborate coiffure of the damsels of the counter, in whom a desire to shine inspires a more than English attention to trifling details in matters of the toilette.

Césarine's beauty was neither that of an English court lady nor of a French duchess, but the plump and auburn-haired comeliness of Rubens' Flemish women. She had inherited her father's turned-up nose, but its delicacy of outline gave a sprightly charm to a face, of the essentially French type so well rendered by Largillière. The rich silken tissue of the skin indicated the abundant vitality of girlhood. Her mother's broad brow was lightened by a girlish serenity, untroubled by care, and there was a tender grace in the expression of the blue liquid eyes of the happy-hearted, fair-haired maid. If happiness had taken from her face the romantic interest which painters inevitably give to their compositions by an expression somewhat too pensive, the vague,

wistful instincts of the young girl who has never left her mother's wing made an approach to this ideal. With all her apparent slenderness, she was strongly made. Her feet indicated her father's peasant origin, a racial defect, like the redness of her hands—the sign-manual of a purely bourgeois descent. Sooner or later she was sure to grow stout. Occasionally young and fashionable women had come within her ken; and in course of time she had acquired from them the instinct of dress, certain ways of carrying her head, and manners of speaking and moving, thus copied, which turned the heads of the assistants and other young men; in their eyes she seemed to have a distinguished air.

Popinot had vowed to himself that no woman but Césarine should be his wife. This mobile blonde, whom a glance seemed to read, who seemed ready to melt into tears at a harsh word, was the one woman in whose presence he could feel conscious of masculine superiority. The charming girl inspired love, without leaving time to consider whether or no she had sufficient *ésprit* to ensure that the love should be lasting; but what need is there for what we in Paris call *ésprit*, in a class where the essential elements of happiness are good sense and virtue?

In character, Césarine was a second edition of her mother, slightly improved by an education which had taught her superfluous accomplishments. She was fond of music, and had made a crayon drawing of the *Madonna of the Chair*; she perused the works of Mesdames Cottin and Riccoboni, and the writings of Fénelon, Racine, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. She never appeared at her mother's side at the cash-desk save for a few moments before dinner, or when, on rare occasions, she took her place. Her father and mother, like all self-made people, who hasten to plant the seeds of ingratitude in their children by putting the younger generation on a higher level, delighted to make an idol

of Césarine, who, happily, possessed the good qualities of her class, and did not take advantage of their weakness.

Mme. Birotteau followed the architect's movements with earnest, anxious eyes; looking on in consternation, calling her daughter's attention to the strange gyrations of the footrule, as Grindot took his measurements after the manner of architects and builders. For her, each one of those strokes of the wand seemed to lay the place under an evil enchantment, and boded ill to the house; she would fain have had the walls less lofty and the rooms smaller, and dared not put any questions to the young man as to the results of this sorcery.

'Be easy, madame,' he said, with a smile; 'I shall not carry anything away.'

Césarine could not help laughing.

'Sir,' pleaded Constance, who did not so much as notice the architect's quip, 'aim at economy; some day we may be able to make you a return——'

Before César went to M. Molineux, the landlord of the next house, he asked Roguin for the transfer of the lease which Alexandre Crottat was to have drawn up. As he came away from the notary's house, he saw du Tillet at Roguin's study window. Although the *liaison* between his some time assistant and Mme. Roguin was a sufficient explanation of du Tillet's presence in the house at a time when the negotiations for the building land were impending, Birotteau, trustful though he was, felt uncomfortable. Du Tillet's animated face suggested that a discussion was going on.

'Suppose that he should be in the business?' he asked himself, in an access of his commercial prudence.

The suspicion flashed like lightning across his mind. He turned again and saw Mme. Roguin at the window; and then the banker's presence no longer looked so suspicious.

'Still, how if Constance was right?' he asked himself.

How stupid I am to pay any attention to a woman's notions! However, I will talk it over this morning with our uncle. It is only a step from the Cour Batave, where M. Molineux lives, to the Rue des Bourdonnais.'

A suspicious onlooker, a man of business with some experience of rogues, would have been warned; but Birotteau's previous career, together with his lack of mental grasp (for he was but little fitted for retracing a chain of inductions, a process by which an able man arrives at a cause), all led to his ruin. He found the umbrella dealer dressed in his best, and was starting away with him to the landlord, when Virginie, the servant, caught her master by the arm.

'The mistress hopes you will not go out again, sir——'

'Come!' cried Birotteau; 'some more women's notions!'

'Without taking your cup of coffee. It is ready for you.'

'Oh! all right. I have so many things in my head, neighbour,' said Birotteau, turning to Cayron, 'that I do not listen to my stomach. Be so good as to walk on; we shall meet each other at M. Molineux's door, unless you go up and explain the matter to him first. We should save time that way.'

M. Molineux was an eccentric person of independent means, a specimen of a kind of humanity which you will no more find out of Paris than you will find Iceland moss growing anywhere out of Iceland. The comparison is but so much the more apt, for that the man in question belonged to that doubtful borderland between the animal and vegetable kingdoms which awaits the Mercier, who shall classify the various *cryptogamia* which strike root, thrive, or die among the plaster walls of the strange unwholesome old houses affected by the species.

This particular human plant was an umbellifer, to judge by the blue tubular cap which crowned a stem

sheathed in a pair of greenish-coloured breeches, and terminated by bulbous roots enveloped in list slippers. At first sight the plant seems harmless and colourless enough; there is certainly nothing to suggest poison in its appearance. In this strange freak of nature you would have recognised the typical shareholder, who believes in all the news which the daily press baptizes with printer's ink, whose 'Look at the paper' is a final appeal to authority; this (you would have thought) was the bourgeois, essentially a lover of order, always (in theory) in rebellion against the powers that be, to whom in practice he punctually yields obedience; a ferocious creature, take him singly, who grows tame in a crowd of his like. The man who is obdurate as a bailiff where his dues are concerned, gives fresh groundsel to his birds, and saves the fish-bones for the cat; he looks up in the middle of making out a receipt to whistle to the canary; he is suspicious as a turnkey, but will hurry to invest his money in some doubtful undertaking, and then try to recover his losses by the most sordid meanness. The noxious qualities of this hybrid growth are only discovered by use; its nauseous bitterness requires the coction of some piece of business wherein its interests are mingled with those of men.

Like all Parisians, Molineux felt a need to make his power felt. He craved that particular privilege of a sovereignty more or less exercised by every creature, down to the very porter, over a larger or smaller number of victims—a woman, a child, a clerk, or lodger, a horse, a dog, or monkey—that part of domination which consists in handing on to another the mortifications received by an aspirant to higher spheres. The tiresome little old person in question, having neither wife, nor child, nor niece, nor nephew, treated his charwoman so harshly that she gave him no opportunity of venting his spleen upon her, and avoided all collision with him by a rigorous discharge of her duties.

So his appetite for domestic tyranny being thus balked, he was fain to find other ways of satisfying it. He had made a patient study of the law of landlord and tenant, and of the legal aspects of the party-wall; he had fathomed the mysteries of jurisprudence with regard to house-property in Paris, and was learned in its infinitely minute intricacies with regard to boundaries and abutments, easements, rates, charges, regulations for the cleansing of the street, hangings for Fête-Dieu processions, waste-pipes, lights, projections over the public way, and the near proximity of insanitary dwellings. All his mental and physical energies, all his intelligence was devoted to maintaining his authority as a landlord with a high hand; he had made a hobby of his occupation, and the hobby was becoming a mania.

He loved to protect citizens against encroachments on their rights, but opportunities occurred so seldom that his thwarted passion expended itself upon his tenants. A tenant became his enemy, his inferior, his subject, his vassal. He felt that their homage was a due, and regarded those who passed him without a salutation on the stairs as boors. He made out his receipts himself, and sent them at noon on the quarter day; and those who were behindhand received a summons by a certain hour. Then followed a distraint and costs, and all the cavalry of the law came into the field with the celerity of 'the machine,' as the headsman calls his instrument of execution. Molineux gave no grace and no delay; his heart was indurated on the side of rents.

'I will lend you the money if you want it,' he would say to a solvent tenant, 'but pay me my rent; any getting behindhand with the rent means a loss of interest for which the law provides no remedy.'

After a prolonged study of the skittish humours of successive tenants who conformed to no standard and, like successive dynasties, nor more nor less, invariably overturned the institutions of their predecessors, Molineux had

promulgated a charter, which he observed religiously. By virtue of it, the good man never did any repairs; none of his chimneys smoked, his staircases were always in order, his ceilings white, his cornices above reproach, his floors held securely to the joists, and there was no fault to find with the paint. All the locks had been put in within the last three years, every window pane was whole, and as for cracks in the walls, they did not exist; he could see no broken tiles in the floors till the tenants were leaving the house. He usually appeared upon the scene to receive the incoming tenants with a locksmith and a painter and glazier, very handy fellows, he said. The tenant was doubtless at liberty to make improvements; but if the thriftless creature redecorated his rooms, old Molineux set his wits to work, and pondered night and day how to dislodge him and let the newly papered and painted abode to another comer. He set his snares, bided his time, and began the whole series of his unhallowed devices. There was no subtlety in the regulations of Paris with regard to leases that he did not know. He indited polite and amiable communications to his victims; but beneath the manner, as beneath the harmless and obliging expression of the pettifogging scribbler himself, lurked the spirit of a Shylock.

He must always be paid six months in advance, to be deducted from the last half-year's rent, subject to a host of thorny conditions of his own invention. He assured himself that the value of the tenant's furniture was sufficient to cover the rent, and reconnoitred every new tenant like a detective when he came in. There were some occupations which he did not like, and the least sound of a hammer frightened him. When the time came for handing over a lease, he kept it back for a week, conning it over for fear it should contain what he denominated *notary's et ceteras.*

Apart from his character of landlord, Jean-Baptiste Molineux was apparently good-natured and obliging.

He could play a game of boston without complaining of being badly seconded by his partner; his stock subjects for conversation were of the ordinary bourgeois kind, and he found the same things laughable—the arbitrary acts of bakers (the rascals), who give short weights, which are winked at by the police, the heroic seventeen deputies of the Left. He read the Curé Meslier's *Bon Sens*, yet went to mass, halting between Deism and Christianity; but he subscribed nothing for sacramental bread, under the plea that you must resist the encroachments of the priesthood. The indefatigable redresser of grievances would write to this effect to the newspapers, though the newspapers neither inserted his letters nor replied to them. Molineux was, in short, in many respects the ordinary estimable citizen who burns a yule log at Christmas, draws for king on Twelfth Night, plays tricks on the 1st of April, makes the round of the boulevards when the weather is fine, goes to watch the skating; and on days when there are to be fireworks in the Place Louis XV., will take his place there at two o'clock in the afternoon with a piece of bread in his pocket, so as to be 'in the front row.'

The Cour Batave, where the little old man lived, is a result of one of those freaks of the speculative builder which cannot be explained after they have taken substantial form. It is a cloister-like building with its freestone arcading, its covered galleries surrounding the court with a fountain in the middle—a thirsty fountain with its lion jaws agape, not to supply, but to ask for water of every passer-by. Possibly it was intended for a sort of Palais-Royal to adorn the Faubourg Saint-Denis. There is a little light and stir of life during the day in the unwholesome pile shut in on all four sides by tall houses; it lies in the centre of a labyrinth of dank alleys, where the rheumatism lurks for the hurrying foot-passenger, a maze of dark narrow passages which converge here and connect the Quartier des Halles and the

Quartier Saint-Martin by the famous Rue Quincampoix; but at night there is no spot in Paris more deserted, and these little slums might be called the catacombs of commerce. It is the sink of several industries; and if there are few natives of Batavia proper, there are plenty of small tradesmen.

Naturally, all the suites of rooms in this merchant's palace have but one outlook—into the central courtyard—and for this and other reasons the rents asked are of the lowest. M. Molineux inhabited one of the angles of the building. Considerations of health had prompted the choice of a sixth-floor lodging; for fresh air was only to be had at a height of seventy feet from the ground. From the leads, where the worthy owner of house-property was wont to take exercise, he enjoyed a charming view of the windmills of Montmartre. He grew flowers up there too, in defiance of police regulations against these hanging-gardens of the modern Babylon. His sixth-floor establishment consisted of four rooms, without counting the water-closets on the floor above, a valuable property to which his claim was incontestable; he had the key, he had established them. On a first entrance, an indecent bareness at once revealed the miserly nature of the man. Half-a-dozen straw-bottomed chairs stood in the lobby; there was a glazed earthenware stove; and on the walls, covered with a bottle-green paper, hung four prints bought at sales. In the dining-room you beheld a couple of sideboards, two cages full of birds, a table covered with oilcloth, a weather-glass, mahogany chairs with horsehair cushions, and through a French window a view of the aforesaid hanging-gardens. Short, antiquated green silk curtains adorned the sitting-room, and the white-painted wooden furniture was upholstered in green Utrecht velvet. As for the furniture of the old bachelor's room, it was of the period of Louis XV.; disfigured by prolonged wear, and so dirty that a woman in a white gown would have

shrunk from contact with it. The chimney-piece boasted a clock; the dial, between two columns, served as a pediment beneath a statuette of Pallas brandishing a lance—a fabulous personage of antiquity. The tiled floor was so littered over with plates full of scraps for the cats, that it was scarcely possible to move about without setting a foot in one of them. Above the rosewood chest of drawers hung a pastel—Molineux in his youth. Add a few books, tables covered with shabby green cardboard boxes, a case full of the stuffed forms of some departed canaries on a console table, and, to complete the list, a bed so chilly-looking that it might have been a rebuke to a Carmelite.

César Birotteau was charmed with Molineux's exquisite politeness. He found the latter in his grey flannel dressing-gown, keeping an eye on the milk set on a little cast-iron plate warmer, in a corner of the hearth, while he poured the contents of a brown earthen pipkin, in which he had been boiling coffee grounds, into his *cafétière* by spoonfuls at a time. The umbrella dealer had opened the door, lest his landlord should be disturbed in this occupation; but Molineux, holding mayors and deputy-mayors ('our municipal officers,' as he called them) in great veneration, rose at first sight of the magistrate, and stood cap in hand until the great Birotteau should be seated.

'No, sir . . . Yes, sir . . . Ah, sir, if I had known that I was to have the honour of housing a member of the municipal government of Paris amid my humble Penates, pray believe that I should have made it my business to repair to your house; although I am your landlord, or—on the point—of—being——'

Here Birotteau by a gesture entreated him to put on his cap.

'I shall do nothing of the kind; I shall remain bareheaded until you are seated, and have put on your hat if you have a cold. My room is rather chilly; my narrow

means do not permit—God bless you, Mr. Deputy-mayor!'

Birotteau had sneezed while fumbling for his papers. He held them out, not without remarking that to save any delay he had had them made out at his own expense by M. Roguin his notary.

'I do not call M. Roguin's knowledge in question; 'tis an old name, well known in the Parisian notariat; but I have my little ways of doing things, and I look after my affairs myself, a hobby excusable enough; and my notary is——'

'But this is such a simple matter,' said the perfumer, accustomed to prompt decisions on the part of buyers and sellers.

'*Simple!*' echoed Molineux. 'Nothing is simple where house property is concerned. Ah! you are not a landlord, sir; so much the happier you! If you but knew the lengths to which a tenant will push ingratitude, and what precautions we have to take! Now just listen to this sir; I have a tenant——' and for fifteen minutes Molineux held forth, relating how that M. Gendrin, a draughtsman, had eluded the vigilance of the caretaker in the Rue Saint-Honoré. M. Gendrin had perpetrated scandals worthy of a Marat, obscene drawings! and the police tolerated it, nay, they were made with the connivance of the police! Then this Gendrin, an artist of thoroughly immoral character, had gone back to the house with loose women, and made it impossible to go up and down the stairs, a prank worthy of a man who drew caricatures to ridicule the Government. And why all these misdeeds? . . . Because he was asked to pay his rent on the 15th! Gendrin and Molineux were about to go to law about it; for while the artist did not pay, he insisted on occupying the empty rooms. Molineux received anonymous letters—from Gendrin no doubt—threatening to murder him some night in the alleys about the Cour Batave.

'Things have arrived at such a pitch, sir,' he went on, 'that the Prefect of Police, to whom in confidence I related my difficulty (at the same time, I took the opportunity of saying a word or two touching the alterations that ought to be made in the provisions of the law for such cases), gave me an authorisation to carry firearms in self-defence.'

The little old man got up to look for his pistols.

'Here they are, sir!' cried he.

'But you have nothing of that kind to fear from me, sir,' said Birotteau, glancing at Cayron with a smile that plainly expressed his pity for such a man.

Molineux caught the glance, and was shocked to see such a look on the countenance of a 'municipal officer, whose duty it was to see to the safety of those in his district. He could have forgiven it in anybody else, but in Birotteau it was unpardonable.

'Sir,' Molineux answered drily, 'one of the most highly respected judges in the Consular Tribune, a deputy-mayor, and an honourable merchant, would not condescend to such baseness, for baseness it is! But in this particular case you want the consent of your landlord, M. le Comte de Granville, before you make a hole in the wall, and stipulations must be made in the agreement touching the restoration of the wall on the expiration of the lease. As a matter of fact, too, the rent is a great deal lower than it will be; rents will go up all about the Place Vendôme; they are going up already! The Rue Castiglione is about to be built. I am binding myself down—I am binding—myself——'

'Let us have done with it,' said Birotteau. 'What do you want? I have had enough experience of business to guess that your reasonings can be silenced by the great argument—money! Well, how much do you want?'

'Nothing but what is fair, sir. How long has your lease to run?'

'Seven years,' answered Birotteau.

'What may not my first floor be worth in seven years' time?' cried Molineux. 'What will two furnished rooms let for over in your quarter? More than two hundred francs a month very likely! I am binding myself; binding myself down by a lease. So we will set down the rent at fifteen hundred francs. At that figure I will consent to receive you as a tenant for the two rooms instead of M. Cayron here,' giving the dealer a sly wink, 'and let you have them on lease for seven consecutive years. The opening in the wall you will make at your own charges, subject to your bringing to me proof that M. le Comte de Granville sanctions it and waives all his rights in the matter. Whatever happens in consequence of the small opening, the responsibility will rest upon you; but you shall be in nowise bound to reinstate the wall so far as I am concerned; you shall pay me down five hundred francs now instead; we never can tell what may happen; and I don't want to run about after anybody to put up my wall again for me.'

'The conditions seem to me scarcely fair,' put in Birotteau.

'Then you must pay me down seven hundred and fifty francs *hic et nunc*, to be carried forward till the last six months of possession; the lease will be a sufficient discharge. Oh! I will take bills of exchange for value received in rent, at any date you please, so that I have my guarantee. I am a plain-dealing man, and go straight to the point in business. We will stipulate that you shall wall up the door on my staircase, where you have no right of way . . . at your own expense . . . in brick and mortar. Reassure yourself, I shall not call upon you to make it good when the lease expires; I shall regard the five hundred francs as an indemnity. You will always find me reasonable, sir.'

'We in business are not so particular,' said the per-

fumer; 'if we had all these formalities, we should do no business at all.'

'Oh, in business, that is quite another thing, especially in the perfumery line, where everything slips off and on like a glove,' said the little old man, with a sour smile. 'But with house property in Paris, sir, you cannot be too particular. Why, I had a tenant in the Rue Montorgueil——'

'I should be very sorry to delay your breakfast, sir,' said Birotteau; 'here are the deeds, set them right, all that you ask me is agreed to; let us sign the documents to-morrow, and give our promises by word of mouth to-day, for to-morrow my architect must be put in possession of the place.'

Molineux looked again at the umbrella-dealer. 'There is part of the term expired, sir; M. Cayron has no mind to pay for it; we will add the amount to the little bills, so that the agreement will run from January to January. That will be more business-like.'

'So be it,' said Birotteau.

'There is the halfpenny in the shilling for the porter——'

'Why, you are not allowing me to use the staircase and the doorway; it is not right that——'

'Oh! but you are a tenant!' cried little Molineux in peremptory tones, up in arms for the principle involved. 'You must pay door and window taxes and your share of the rates. If once we clearly understand each other, sir, there will be no difficulties hereafter.—Is your business rapidly increasing, sir; are you doing well?'

'Yes,' said Birotteau, 'but that is not my reason. I am inviting a few of my friends, partly to celebrate the evacuation of the foreign troops, partly on the occasion of my own promotion to the Legion of Honour——'

'Aha!' said Molineux, 'a well-deserved honour.'

'Yes,' said Birotteau. 'It may be that I have shown myself not unworthy of this signal mark of royal favour

by acting in my capacity at the Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for the Bourbons on the steps of Saint-Roch, on the 13th of Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon; these claims——'

'Equal those of our heroes in the late army. The ribbon is red, because it has been dyed in blood shed for France.'

At these words, a quotation from the *Constitutionnel*, Birotteau could not resist the impulse to invite little Molineux, who grew quite incoherent in his thanks, and was almost ready to forgive the slight which had been put upon him. The old man went as far as the stair-head with his new tenant, overwhelming him with civilities.

As soon as they were outside in the Cour Batave, Birotteau looked at Cayron with an amused expression.

'I did not think that there was such a weak-minded creature in existence,' he said; 'idiot' had been on the tip of his tongue, but he suppressed it in time.

'Ah, sir!' said Cayron, 'everybody is not as clever as you are.'

Birotteau might be excused for thinking himself a clever man compared with Molineux; the umbrella-dealer's reply drew a pleasant smile from him; he took leave of his companion with a regal air.

'Here am I at the Market,' he said to himself; 'let us arrange about the hazel-nuts.'

After an hour spent in making inquiries, the market-woman referred Birotteau to the Rue des Lombards, the headquarters of the trade in nuts for confectionery, and there his friends the Matifats informed him that the only wholesale dealer in hazel-nuts was one Mme. Angélique Madou, resident in the Rue Perrin-Gasselin; and that this was the one house in the trade for genuine Provençal filberts and white Alpine hazel-nuts.

The Rue Perrin-Gasselin lies in a quadrangle bounded by the Quay, the Rue Saint-Denis, the Rue de la Fer-

ronnerie, and the Rue de la Monnaie, a labyrinth of slums which are, as it were, the entrails of Paris. Here countless numbers of heterogeneous and nondescript industries are carried on; evil-smelling trades, and the manufacture of the daintiest finery, herrings and lawn, silk and honey, butter and tulle, jostle each other in its squalid precincts. Here are the headquarters of those multitudinous small trades which Paris no more suspects in its midst than a man surmises the functions performed by the pancreas in the human economy. In this congested district, in which one Bidault of the Rue Grenétat (otherwise known as Gigonnet the pawnbroker) played the part of leech, the whole stock of goods sold in the Great Market is kept. The ancient mews are warehouses where tons of oil are stored; the old coach-houses hold thousands of pairs of cotton stockings.

Mme. Madou, sometime a fish-wife, had gone into the 'dry-fruit line' some ten years before this present year of grace, on her entrance into a partnership with the late owner of the business, who had an old-established connection among the ladies of the Great Market. Her beauty, of a vigorous and provocative order, had disappeared in excessive stoutness. She lived on the ground floor of a yellow dilapidated house, held together by iron cramps at every story. The departed dealer in dry fruit had succeeded in ridding himself of competitors, and had secured a monopoly of the trade; so that in spite of some slight defects of education, his successor could continue in the same groove, and came and went in her warehouses, old out-buildings, stables, and workshops, where she waged war against insect life with some success.

Mme. Angélique Madou dispensed with counting-house, safe, and book-keeping (for she could neither read nor write), and answered a letter by blows of the fist, for she looked upon it as an insult. In other respects she was a good-natured soul, with a high-coloured counten-

ance, and a bandanna handkerchief tied about her head beneath her cap, and a trumpet voice which won the respect of the carmen who brought goods to the Rue Perrin-Gasselin, and whose 'rows' with her usually ended in a bottle of *petit blanc*. She could not well have any trouble with the growers who supplied her, for she always paid cash on delivery, the only way of carrying on such a business as hers, and Mother Madou went into the country to see them in the summer-time.

Birotteau found this shrewish saleswoman among her sacks of hazel-nuts, chestnuts, and walnuts.

'Good day, my dear lady,' said Birotteau flippantly.

'*Your dear!*' returned she. 'So you have pleasant recollections of your dealings with me, have you? Have we met each other at Court?'

'I am a perfumer, and what is more, deputy-mayor of the Second Arrondissement of Paris, and I have a right to expect a different tone from you.'

'I marry when I have a mind,' said the virago; 'I am no customer at the mayor's office, and don't trouble deputy-mayors much. And as for my customers, they adore me, and I talk to 'em as I please. If they don't like it, they may take themselves somewhere else.'

'See what comes of a monopoly,' muttered Birotteau.

'Popole? that's my godson; he has been up to some foolery perhaps; have you come for him, your worship?' she asked, in milder tones.

'No. I have the honour to inform you that I come to you as a customer.'

'All right. What is your name, my lad? I haven't seen you here before.'

'If that is the way you talk, you ought to sell your nuts cheap,' said Birotteau, and he mentioned his name and designation.

'Oh! you are the famous Birotteau with the handsome wife. Well, and what weight do you want of these little dears of hazel-nuts, honey?'

Mrs MEADOW

'Six thousand pounds weight.'

'It is as much as I have,' said the saleswoman, with a voice like a cracked flute. 'You are not in the do-nothing line, marrying the girls, and making scent for them. Lord, bless you! you do a trade, you do! Sorry I have so little for you! You will be a fine customer, and your name will be written on the heart of the woman that I love best in the world——'

'Who may that be?'

'Who but dear Madame Madou.'

'What do you want for the nuts?'

'Twenty-five francs the hundred-weight to you, mister, if you take the lot.'

'Twenty-five francs,' said Birotteau. 'That is fifteen hundred francs! And I shall very likely take a hundred thousand pounds weight in a year!'

'But just look at the quality; no husks!' cried she, plunging a red arm into a sack of filberts. 'Sound kernels, my dear sir. Just think, now, the grocers sell their mixed dessert fruits at twenty-four sous the pound, and in every four pounds they put more than a pound of hazel-nuts. Am I to lose money on the goods to please you? You are a nice man, but I don't care enough about you yet to do that. As you are taking such a quantity, we might let you have them at twenty francs, for it won't do to send away a deputy-mayor; it would bring bad luck to the young couples! A good article; just feel the weight of them! They wouldn't go fifty to the pound! Sound nuts they are, not a maggot among them!'

'Well, send six thousand pounds weight early to-morrow morning to my factory in the Rue Faubourg-du-Temple, for two thousand francs at ninety days.'

'They shall be punctual as a bride at a wedding. Well, good-bye, M. le Maire; we part good friends. But if it is all the same to you,' she added, following Birotteau into the court, 'I would rather have a bill at forty days,

for I have let you have them too cheap, and I can't afford to lose the interest on the money too. For all his sentimental ways, old Gigonnet sucks the life out of us, as a spider sucks a fly.'

'Very well, yes, fifty days. But I'll have the nuts by weight, so as not to lose on the hollow ones. They must be weighed or I'll have nothing to do with them.'

'Oh, the fox; he knows that dodge, does he?' said Mme. Madou; 'you can't catch him napping. Those beggars in the Rue des Lombards put him up to that! Those great wolves yonder are all in a league to devour us poor lambs.'

The lamb was five feet high and three feet round; she had not a vestige of a waist, and looked like a post in a striped cotton gown.

As he went along the Rue Saint-Honoré, the perfumer, lost in his schemes, meditated on his duel with Macassar Oil. He designed the labels, decided on the shape of the bottles, the quality of the corks, the colour of the placards. And people say that there is no poetry in business! Newton did not make more calculations over the discovery of the famous binomial theorem than Birotteau made for the 'Comagen Essence' (for it was an essence now; the words oil and essence possessed no definite meaning for him, and he went from the one to the other). All these combinations were seething in his head, and he mistook the ferment of an empty brain for the germination of an idea. So absorbed was he in his meditations, that he went past the Rue des Bourdonnais, and bethinking himself of his uncle, was obliged to retrace his steps.

Claude-Joseph Pillerault, formerly a retail ironmonger at the sign of the *Golden Bell*, was one of those human beings whose exterior is the outward and visible expression of a beautiful nature; and heart and brain, language and thought, his manner and the clothes that he wore, were all in harmony. He was the only relation that

Mme. Birotteau had in the world, and upon her and on Césarine Pillerault had centred all his affections; for in the course of his business career he had lost his wife and his son, and a boy whom he had adopted, the son of his cook.

These cruel bereavements had given to the good man's thoughts a cast of Christian stoicism, a lofty doctrine which was the informing spirit of his life, and shed the radiance of a winter sunset over his last years, a glow that brings no warmth. There was a tinge of asceticism about the thin, worn face, where sallow and swarthy tones were harmoniously blended; you saw in it a striking resemblance to typical presentments of Time; but the everyday cares of a retail business had touched this face, there was less of the monumental quality, less of the grimness insisted upon by painters, sculptors, and designers of bronze figures for clocks.

Pillerault was of middle height, and thick-set rather than stout. Nature had fashioned him for hard work and a long life; he was strongly built, as his square shoulders indicated; a man of phlegmatic temper, whose feelings, though he could feel, did not lie on the surface. His quiet manner and resolute face indicated that he was little given to the expression of his emotions; but reserved and undemonstrative though he was, there were depths of tenderness in Pillerault's nature. The principal characteristic of the hazel eyes, with dark specks in them, was their unvarying clearness. There were deep furrows in a forehead sallowed by time, narrow, contracted, and stern, and covered with grey hair, cut so short that it looked like felt. Prudence, not avarice, was expressed in the lines of the thin lips. The brightness of the eyes told of a temperate life; and, indeed, sincerity, a sense of duty, and a real humility glorified his features and set off his face, as health does.

For sixty years he had led a hard and dreary existence, a constant struggle for a livelihood. It was the same

story as César's own, with César's luck omitted. Pillerault had remained an assistant till he was thirty years old; he had embarked his capital in business at an age when César was investing his savings in *rentes*; then the law of the maximum had hit him hard, and his pick-axes and spades had been requisitioned. His taciturn wisdom, his foresight, and logical clear-headedness had had their effect on his 'ways of doing business.' His bargains were concluded as a rule by word of mouth, and difficulties seldom arose. Like most meditative people, he was an observer; he said little, and studied those who talked; often he had declined good bargains of which his neighbours had availed themselves, and subsequently repented, and vowed that Pillerault could smell out a rogue. He preferred sure gains, if of the smallest, to bold strokes of business involving heavy sums.

His stock of hardware consisted of grates, gridirons, cast-iron fire-dogs, boilers, and copper cauldrons, hoes, and such agricultural implements as labourers use, somewhat unremunerative branches of a business that involves continual drudgery. Hardware is ponderous, awkward to handle, and difficult to store, and the profits are not heavy in proportion; so Pillerault had nailed up many a case, sent off many packages, and unloaded many vans. Never had a competence been more honourably earned, more thoroughly deserved, more to the credit of the man who had made it. He had never asked too much, had never run after business. Towards the end of the time, you might have seen him smoking his pipe in the doorway and watching his assistants at work. In 1814, when he retired, his actual capital at first consisted of seventy thousand francs, which he invested in Government stock, that brought him in five thousand and some odd hundred francs a year, with a further forty thousand francs due in five years time, when the assistant to whom he had sold the business was to pay for it. On this amount, meanwhile, no interest was paid. For thirty

years he had annually made seven per cent. on a turnover of a hundred thousand francs, and had lived on half his income. Such was his balance-sheet.

His neighbours, but little jealous of this by no means brilliant success, extolled his wisdom without comprehending it.

At the corner of the Rue de la Monnaie and the Rue Saint-Honoré stands the Café David, where a few retired tradesmen, such as Pillerault, congregate of an evening to take their coffee. At one time, Pillerault's adoption of his cook's son had occasioned a few jokes among its frequenters, such jokes as are addressed to a man looked up to among his fellows, for the ironmonger received a respect for which he had not sought; his own self-respect sufficed him. So when Pillerault lost the poor young fellow, there were more than two hundred people at the funeral who followed his adopted child to the grave. He behaved heroically in those days, making no parade of his grief, bearing it as a brave man bears sorrow. This increased the sympathy felt in the quarter for the 'good man,' as they called him, and the accent in which the words were spoken gave the words a wider and ennobled meaning when they were applied to Pillerault.

Claude Pillerault had become so accustomed to the sober even tenor of his life, that when he retired from business and entered upon the time of leisure, which hangs so heavily on many a Parisian tradesman's hands, he could not unbend and divert himself with the amusements of an idle life; he made no change in his housekeeping; and his old age was enlivened by his political opinions, which, let us admit it at once, were those of the extreme Left.

Pillerault belonged to the artisan class, which the Revolution had brought into co-operation with the small shopkeepers. The one blot on his character was the importance which he attached to the victory of his

principles; he dwelt fondly on his rights, on liberty, on the great results of the Revolution; he firmly believed that his political freedom and existence were being undermined by the Jesuits, whose underhand power the Liberals discovered, and threatened by the ideas with which the *Constitutionnel* credited Monsieur the King's brother. He was, however, consistent in his life and in his ideas; there was nothing narrow in his political views; he never abused his adversaries, he held courtiers in suspicion, and believed in Republican virtues. He imagined that Manuel was guiltless of any excesses, that General Foy was a great man, and Casimir Périer without ambition; to his thinking, Lafayette was a political prophet, Courier a good man. In short, he beheld noble chimerical visions.

The good man was domestic in his habits; he made part of the family circle in which his niece lived—the Ragons, Judge Popinot, Joseph Lebas, and the Matifats. Fifteen hundred francs a year supplied his needs; the rest of his income was spent in charitable deeds and in presents to his grand-niece; four times a year he gave a dinner to his friends at Roland's in the Rue du Hasard, and took them afterwards to the play. He played the part of the old bachelor friend on whom married women draw bills at sight for their fancies; for a country excursion, a party for the Opéra or the Montagnes-Beaujon; and Pillerault would be very happy at such times in the pleasure which he was giving, and felt the gladness in other hearts.

If Molineux's character was written at large in his queer furniture, Pillerault's pure heart and simple life were no less revealed by his surroundings. His abode consisted of a lobby, a sitting-room, and bedroom. But for the difference in size, it might have been a Carthusian's cell. The lobby, floored with red tiles, which were beeswaxed, boasted but one window, hung with dimity curtains edged with scarlet; mahogany chairs with red

leather cushions, and studded with brass nails, stood against the wall, which was covered with an olive-green paper, and adorned with pictures—a *Declaration of Independence*, a portrait of Bonaparte as First Consul, and a *Battle of Austerlitz*. The furniture of the sitting-room, doubtless left to the upholsterer, was yellow, and covered with a flowered pattern; there was a carpet on the floor; the bronze ornaments on the chimney-piece were not gilded. There was a painted fire-screen before the grate; a vase of artificial flowers under a glass shade stood on a console, and a liqueur stand on a round table covered with a cloth. It was evident from the unused look of the room that it was a concession to convention on the part of the retired ironmonger, who rarely received visitors.

His own room was as bare as that of a monk or an old soldier, the two men who make the truest estimate of life. In the alcove a holy-water stoup caught the eye, a profoundly touching confession of faith in a Republican stoic.

An old woman came in to do the work of the establishment; but so great was Pillerault's reverence for womankind, that he would not allow her to clean his shoes, and made an arrangement with a shoeblack.

His costume was plain, and never varied. He always wore a coat and breeches of blue cloth, a cotton waistcoat, a white cravat, and very low walking-shoes; and on high days and holidays a coat with metal buttons. He rose, breakfasted, went out, dined, and returned home when the evening was over with the strictest regularity, for a methodical life conduces to health and length of days. César, the Ragons, and the Abbé Loraux always avoided the subject of politics; those of his own circle knew better than to court attack by trying to convert him. Like his nephew and the Ragons, he put great faith in Roguin; for him a notary of Paris was always a being to be venerated, and probity incarnate. In the matter of the building land, Pillerault

had examined it so thoroughly, that the remembrance of his investigations had given César moral support in the combat with his wife's forebodings.

As César climbed the seventy-two steps of the stairs which led to the low brown doorway of his uncle's rooms, he thought within himself that the old man must be very hale to go up and down them daily without a murmur. He found the coat and breeches hanging on a peg outside, and Mme. Vaillant busy rubbing and brushing them; while the philosopher himself, in his grey flannel dressing-gown, was breakfasting by the fireside, and conning the reports of parliamentary debates in the *Constitutionnel* or the *Journal du Commerce*.

'The affair is settled, uncle,' said César; 'they are just about to draft the documents; but if you have any doubts or regret about it, there is still time to cry off.'

'Why should I cry off? It is a good piece of business, but it takes some time to realise, like everything that is safe. My fifty thousand francs are lying at the bank; the last instalment of five thousand francs for my business was paid in yesterday. As for the Ragons, they are putting all that they have into it."

'Why, how do they live?'

'Never mind; they live, at all events.'

'I understand you, uncle,' said Birotteau, deeply touched, and he grasped the austere old man's hands tightly in his.

'What are you going to do about this business?' Pillerault asked abruptly.

'I shall take three-eighths; you and the Ragons will take an eighth between you; I shall credit you with the amount in my books until they decide the question of the deeds.'

'Good! Are you so very rich, my boy, that you pay down three hundred thousand francs? It looks to me as though you were risking a good deal of money outside your business; won't the business suffer? After all, it is

your own affair. If you are pulled up, here are the funds at ninety; I could sell out two thousand francs in consols. Take care, though, my boy; if you come to me, you will be laying hands on your girl's fortune.'

'Uncle, you say the kindest things as if they were a matter of course; it goes to my heart to hear you.'

'General Foy touched me after another fashion just now! There, at all events, it is settled. The building lots won't fly away; we shall have them for half their value; and even if we should have to wait six years, there will still be something in the way of interest; timber-yards would pay rent, so we cannot lose. There is only one thing, and that is impossible—Roguin will not run away with our capital——'

'But that is what my wife said last night; she is afraid——'

'That Roguin will run off with our money,' said Pillerault, laughing; 'and why?'

'Well, she says she doesn't like the cut of his features; and, like all men who cannot have women, he is frantic for——'

An incredulous smile stole over Pillerault's face; he tore a leaf out of a little book, filled in the amount, and signed his name.

'Here, this is an order on the bank for a hundred thousand francs, for Ragon's share and mine. Those poor people, though, to make up the money, sold out their fifteen shares in the Wortschin mines to your worthless rogue of a du Tillet. Good people in sore straits; it goes to one's heart to see it. And such good people they are, such noble people, the flower of the old-fashioned bourgeoisie, in fact! Their brother Popinot, the judge, knows nothing about it; they are hiding their affairs from him, lest they should hinder him from giving free course to his benevolence. People who have worked as I did for thirty years——'

'God grant that the Comagen Oil succeeds!' cried

Birotteau, 'and I shall be doubly pleased. Good-day, uncle; you are coming to dine with us on Sunday with the Ragons and Roguin; and M. Claparon is coming, for we are all going to sign the papers the day after to-morrow; to-morrow will be Friday, and I don't want to do bus——'

'Do you really believe in those superstitions?'

'I shall never believe that the day when the Son of God was put to death by men can be a lucky day, uncle. Why?—people stop all business even on the 21st of January.'

'Good-bye till Sunday,' said Pillerault abruptly.

'If it weren't for his political opinions,' said Birotteau to himself, as he went downstairs again, 'I do not know where they would find his equal here below. What are politics to him? He would get on very nicely without thinking of them at all. His infatuation shows that no one is perfect.—Three o'clock already!' said César, as he entered his shop.

'Are you going to take these bills, sir?' asked Célestin, holding out the umbrella-dealer's collection of bills.

'Yes, at six per cent., no commission.—Wife, put out all my things ready for me; I am going to call on M. Vauquelin, you know why. Above all things, a white cravat.'

Birotteau gave some orders to his assistants; he did not see Popinot, guessed that his future partner had gone to dress for the visit, and went up at once to his own room, where the Dresden Madonna met his eyes in a magnificent frame, according to his orders.

'Well, it looks fine, doesn't it?'

'Why, papa, say it is beautiful, or people will laugh at you.'

'Here is a girl for you that scolds her father! . . . Well, for my own part, I like *Hero and Leander* quite as much. The *Madonna* is a religious subject, which could be hung up in an oratory; but *Hero and Leander!* Ah! I will buy it, for the flask of oil suggested some ideas to me.'

'But I don't understand, papa.'

'Virginie, call a cab!' shouted César, in a voice that rang through the house. He had finished shaving, and the shy Anselme Popinot appeared, dragging his feet, for he thought of Césarine. He had not discovered as yet that he was not lame in the eyes of his lady-love, a sweet proof of love, which only those to whom fate has given some bodily deformity can receive.

'The press will be in working order to-morrow, sir,' he said.

'Very well. What is the matter, Popinot?' asked César, seeing Anselme's flushed face.

'I am so glad, sir; I have found a place, a front and back shop, and a kitchen, and the rooms above, and a storeroom, all for twelve hundred francs a year, in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants.'

'We must have an eighteen years' lease of it,' said Birotteau. 'But let us go to M. Vauquelin, and we can talk on the way,' and César and Popinot drove away under the eyes of the assistants, who were at a loss what to think of such magnificent attire, and so unusual a portent as a cab, ignorant as they were of the mighty matters that occupied the owner of the *Queen of Roses*.

'So we shall soon know the truth about the hazel-nuts!' said the perfumer.

'Hazel-nuts?' queried Popinot.

'You have my secret, Popinot,' said the perfumer; 'I let slip the word "hazel-nuts," and that tells everything. Hazel-nut oil is the only oil which produces any effect on the hair; no other house has thought of it. When I saw the print of *Hero and Leander*, I said to myself, "If the ancients put so much oil on their heads, there must have been some reason for it," for the ancients are the ancients! In spite of modern pretensions, I am of Boileau's opinion about the ancients. From that I came to the idea of hazel-nuts, thanks to young Bian-

chon, the medical student, your relative; he told me that the students at the École put hazel-nut oil on their moustaches and whiskers to make them grow. All we want now is the illustrious M. Vauquelin's approval. Enlightened by him, we shall not deceive the public. Only just now I was over in the Market buying the raw material of a saleswoman there; and in another moment I shall be in the presence of one of the greatest scientific men in France for the quintessence of the matter. There's sense in proverbs—extremes meet. Trade is the intermediary between vegetable products and science, you see, my boy! Angélique Madou collects the material, M. Vauquelin distils it, and we sell an essence. Hazel-nuts are worth five sous the pound, M. Vauquelin will increase their value a hundredfold, and we shall perhaps do a service to humanity; for if vanity is a plague of man, a good cosmetic is a benefit.'

The devout admiration with which Popinot listened to the father of his Césarine stimulated Birotteau's eloquence; he indulged in the crudest rhetorical display that a philistine's brain can devise.

'Be reverent, Anselme,' he said, as they reached the street in which Vauquelin lived; 'we are about to enter the sanctuary of science. Put the *Madonna* in evidence, but without making any parade of it, on a chair in the dining-room. If only I can manage to say what I want to say without making a muddle of it!' cried Birotteau artlessly. 'Popinot, that man produces a chemical effect on me, the sound of his voice makes me quite hot inside, and even gives me a slight colic. He is my benefactor, Anselme, and in a few minutes he will be your benefactor too.'

Popinot turned cold at the words, set down his feet as if he were treading on eggs, and looked uneasily round the room.

M. Vauquelin was in his study when Birotteau was announced. The man of science knew that the perfumer

was a deputy-mayor and in high favour; he received his visitor.

'So you do not forget me now that you are so high up in the world,' he said; 'well, between a chemist and a perfumer there is but a hand's-breadth.'

'Alas! there is a great distance between your genius and a plain man like me, sir; and as for what you call "being high up in the world," it is all owing to you, and I shall never forget it in this world or the next.'

'Oh! in the next we shall all be equal they say, cobblers and kings.'

'That is to say, those kings and cobblers who have lived piously,' remarked Birotteau.

'Is this your son?' asked Vauquelin, looking at little Popinot, who was beyond expression amazed to find nothing extraordinary in the study. He had expected to see prodigious marvels, giant engines, vivified substances, and metals flying about.

'No, sir; but he is a young man in whom I am very much interested, and he has come to entreat your goodness, which is equal to your talent, and is it not infinite?' remarked Birotteau diplomatically. 'We have come, after an interval of sixteen years, to consult you a second time on a matter of importance, concerning which I am as ignorant as a perfumer.'

'Let us hear about it. What is it?'

'I know that the subject of hair occupies your nights, and that you are devoting yourself to the analysis of the substance! While you have been thinking for glory, I have been thinking too for trade.'

'Dear M. Birotteau, what do you want of me—an analysis of hair?'

He took up a loose sheet.

'I am about to read a paper before the Académie des Sciences,' he went on. 'Hair is composed of a somewhat large proportion of mucus, a little colourless oil, a larger proportion of dark-greenish oil, and iron; I find a certain

amount of oxide of manganese, and of phosphate of lime, and traces of carbonate of lime, and silica; sulphur enters largely into its composition. The proportions in which these different substances are present vary, and so cause the different colourings of hair. Red hair, for example, on analysis yields much more of the dark-green oil than the other kinds give.'

César and Popinot opened their eyes ludicrously wide.

'Nine things,' cried Birotteau. 'What, are there metals and oils in hair? It takes the word of a man like you, whom I venerate, to make me believe it. How extraordinary! . . . God is great, M. Vauquelin.'

'Hair is produced by a follicular organ,' the great chemist continued; 'a follicle is a sort of bag open at both ends; at the one end it is connected with nerves and blood-vessels, and the hair issues from the other. According to some of our learned associates, one of whom is M. de Blainville, the hair is dead matter expelled from the sac or secreting gland, which is full of a pulpy tissue.'

'It is like perspiration in sticks, as you might say,' cried Popinot, for which the perfumer promptly kicked his shins.

Vauquelin smiled at Popinot's notion. On this, 'He has capacity, hasn't he?' said César, looking at Popinot. 'But if hair is dead, to begin with, sir, you can't possibly restore it, and it is all over with us! the prospectus is nonsense! You don't know how funny the public is; you can't go and tell people——'

'That there is a rubbish heap on their heads,' said Popinot, trying to make Vauquelin laugh again.

'An aerial catacomb,' returned the chemist, keeping up the joke.

'And the nuts that are bought!' cried Birotteau, with a lively sense of the pecuniary loss. 'But why do they sell——?'

'Reassure yourself,' said Vauquelin, smiling. 'I see;

some secret for preventing the hair from falling out or turning grey is the matter in question. Listen; here are my conclusions after all my researches.'

Popinot pricked up his ears at this like a startled leveret.

'The blanching of the fibres, dead or alive, is, in my opinion, produced by an interruption of the secretion of the colouring matter; this theory would explain the fact that some fur-bearing animals in cold climates turn white or some lighter colour at the beginning of winter.'

'Hm! Popinot.'

'It is evident,' Vauquelin continued, 'that the change of colour is due to sudden change in the temperature of the circumambient air——'

'Circumambient, Popinot—mind that! mind that!' cried César.

'Yes,' said Vauquelin, 'to alternations of cold and heat, or to interior phenomena, which produce the same effect. So, in all probability, headaches and other local affections dissipate the fluid or derange the secretions. The inside of the head is the doctors' province. As for the outside, put on your cosmetics by all means.'

'Well, sir,' said Birotteau, 'now I can breathe again after what you say. I thought of selling the oil of hazel-nuts, remembering the use the ancients made of oil for their hair; and the ancients are the ancients, I am of Boileau's opinion. Why did wrestlers oil themselves——?'

'Olive-oil would do quite as well as oil of hazel-nuts,' said Vauquelin, who had paid no attention to Birotteau's remarks. 'Any oil will do to protect the hair-bulbs from outside influences injurious to the substances which it contains in process of formation; in course of deposit, we chemists would say. Perhaps you are right; the essential oil of hazel-nuts is an irritant, so Dupuytren once told me. I will try to find out the difference between walnut and beech-nut oils, colza, olive, and so forth.'

'Then I am not mistaken,' Birotteau exclaimed triumphantly, 'and a great man bears me out in my opinion. Macassar is done for! Macassar, sir, is a cosmetic they give you, that is, sell you, and sell very dear, to make your hair grow.'

'My dear M. Birotteau,' said Vauquelin, 'there are not two ounces of oil of Macassar in Europe. Oil of Macassar produces not the slightest effect on hair. The Malays will pay its weight in gold for it, because of its supposed preservative action on the hair, not knowing that whale oil is quite as good. No power chemical or divine——'

'Oh! divine—do not say that, M. Vauquelin.'

'Why, my dear sir, God's first law is conformity with Himself; without unity there is no power——'

'Oh, looked at in that way——'

'No power whatever can make the hair grow on a bald head, and you cannot dye white or red hair without danger; but you will do no harm, and there will be no fraud in extolling your oil, and I think that those who use it might preserve their hair.'

'Do you think that the Royal Academy of Science would approve it?'

'Oh! it is no discovery,' said M. Vauquelin. 'And besides, quacks have taken the name of the Academy in vain so often, that it would not help you at all. My conscience will not allow me to look on oil of hazel-nuts as a prodigy.'

'What would be the best way of extracting it, by pressure or by decoction?' asked Birotteau.

'You will obtain the most oil by pressure between two hot plates; but if the plates are cold, it will be of better quality. It ought to be applied to the skin itself, and not rubbed into the hair,' continued Vauquelin good-naturedly, 'or the effect will be lost.'

'Mind you remember this, Popinot,' said Birotteau, as his face flushed up with enthusiasm.—'You see in him,

sir, a young man who will reckon this day among the great days of his life. He knew and revered you before he had seen you. Ah! we often talk of you at home; a name that is always in the heart comes often to the lips. We pray every day for you, my wife and daughter and I, as we ought to do for our benefactor.'

'It is too much for so little,' said Vauquelin, embarrassed by the perfumer's voluble gratitude.

'Tut, tut, tut!' said Birotteau. 'You cannot hinder us from loving you, you who will accept nothing from me. You are like the sun; you shed light around you, and those on whom it shines can do nothing for you in return.'

The man of science rose, smiling, to his feet; Birotteau and Anselme Popinot rose also.

'Look round, Anselme; take a good look at this study. If you will allow him, sir? Your time is so valuable, perhaps he will never come here again.'

'Well, are you satisfied with your business?' asked Vauquelin, turning to Birotteau; 'for, after all, we are both of us men of business——'

'Pretty well, sir,' said Birotteau, going towards the dining-room, whither Vauquelin followed him; 'but it will take a great deal of capital to start this oil under the name of Comagen Essence——'

'"Essence" and "Comagen" are two words that clash. Call your cosmetic Birotteau's Oil; or if you have no mind to blaze your name abroad, take another—— Why, there is the Dresden Madonna. . . . Ah! M. Birotteau, you mean us to fall out at parting.'

'M. Vauquelin,' said the perfumer, taking both the chemist's hands in his, 'the scarce print has no value save for the persistent efforts which I have made to find it; all Germany has been ransacked for a proof before letters on India paper; I knew you wished to have it, you were too busy to procure it yourself, so I have taken it upon myself to be your agent. Please accept, not a paltry

print, but the earnest efforts, the care, and pains which prove a boundless devotion. I should have been glad if you had wanted some substances that could only be found in the depths of an abyss, that I might come to tell you, "Here they are!" We have so many chances to be forgotten, let me put myself, my wife, and daughter, and the son-in-law whom I shall have one day, all before your eyes; and say to yourself when you see the Madonna, "There are honest folk who think of me."'

'I accept it,' said Vauquelin.

Popinot and Birotteau wiped their eyes, so much moved were they by the kind tone in which the chemist spoke.

'Will you carry your kindness yet further?' asked the perfumer.

'What is it?' asked Vauquelin.

'I am inviting a few of my friends—(here he raised himself on tiptoe, but his face assumed a humble expression)—partly to celebrate the liberation of the soil, and partly on the occasion of my own promotion to the Legion of Honour.'

'Aha!' said Vauquelin in astonishment.

'It may be that I have shown myself worthy of this signal mark of royal favour, by discharging my functions at the Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for the Bourbons on the steps of Saint-Roch's Church on the 13th of Vendémiaire, when I was wounded by Napoleon. . . . My wife is giving a ball on Sunday in twenty days' time; will you come to it, sir? Do us the honour of dining with us on that day; and for my own part, it will be as if they had given me the Cross twice. I will write to you in good time.'

'Very well, yes,' said Vauquelin.

'My heart is swelling with pleasure,' cried the perfumer when they were in the street. 'He will come to my house! I am afraid that I have forgotten what he said about hair; do you remember it, Popinot?'

'Yes, sir, and in twenty years time I shall still remember it.'

'A great man, that he is! What insight and what penetration!' exclaimed Birotteau. 'He went straight to the point, he read our thoughts at once, and showed us how to make a clean sweep of Macassar Oil. Ah! nothing can make hair grow, Macassar, so that is a lie! Popinot, there is a fortune within our grasp. So let us be at the factory by seven o'clock to-morrow morning, the nuts will come in, and we will make the oil. There is no use in his saying that any oil will do; it would be all over with us if the public knew that. If there were not a little hazel-nut oil and scent in this composition of ours, what excuse should we have for selling it at three or four francs for as many ounces?'

'And you are to be decorated, sir!' said Popinot. 'What glory for——'

'For commerce, isn't it, my boy?'

César Birotteau, sure of a fortune, looked so triumphant, that the assistants noticed his expression, and made signs to each other; for the appearance of a cab, and the fact that their employer and his cashier had changed their clothes, had given rise to the wildest imaginings. The very evident satisfaction of the pair, revealed by the diplomatic glances exchanged between them, and the hopeful eyes that Popinot turned once or twice on Césarine, announced that some important event was imminent, and confirmed the assistants' suspicions. The smallest chance events in their busy and almost monastic lives were as interesting to them as to any prisoner in solitary confinement. Mme. César's face (for she responded doubtfully to the Olympian looks her husband turned on her) portended some new development in the business, for at any other time Mme. César would have been serenely content,—Mme. César, who was so blithe over a good day, and to-day the takings had amounted to the extraordinary sum of six thousand

francs; some old outstanding accounts had been paid.

The dining-room and the kitchen were both on the mezzanine floor, where César and Constance had lived during the first years of their married life. This dining-room, where their honeymoon had been spent, looked like a little drawing-room. The kitchen windows looked out into a little yard; a passage separated the two rooms, and gave access to the staircase, contrived in a corner of the back-shop.

Raguet the errand boy looked after the shop while they sat at dinner; but when dessert appeared, the assistants went downstairs again, and left César and his wife and daughter to finish their meal by the fireside. This tradition had been handed down from the days of the Ragons, who had kept up all the old-fashioned customs and usages in full vigour, and set the same enormous distance between themselves and the assistants that formerly existed between masters and apprentices. Césarine or Constance would then prepare the cup of coffee, which the perfumer took in a low chair by the fire. It was the hour when César told his wife all the small news of the day; he would tell her anything that he had seen in Paris, or what they were doing in the Faubourg du Temple, and about the difficulties that arose there.

'This is certainly one of the most memorable days in our lives, wife!' he began, when the assistants had gone downstairs. 'The hazel-nuts have been bought, the hydraulic press will be ready for work to-morrow, the matter of the building lands has been concluded. And, while I think of it, just put away this order on the bank,' he went on, handing over to her Pillerault's draft. 'The redecoration of the rooms, our new rooms, has been settled.—Dear me! I saw a very queer man to-day in the Cour Batave!'

And he told the women about M. Molineux.

'I see,' his wife broke in, in the middle of a tirade, 'that you will have to pay two hundred thousand francs!'

'True, my wife,' said the perfumer, with mock humility. 'Good Lord! and how are we to pay it? for the building lands near the Madeleine, that will be the finest quarter of Paris some day, must be taken as worth nothing.'

'Some day, César.'

'Dear, dear!'—he continued his joke—'my three-eighths will only be worth a million in six years' time. And how shall we pay two hundred thousand francs?' asked César, making as though he were aghast. 'Well, we will pay it with this,' and he drew from his pocket one of Mme. Madou's hazel-nuts, which he had carefully kept.

He held it up between his thumb and finger. Constance said nothing; but Césarine, whose curiosity was tickled, brought her father his cup of coffee with a 'Come, now, papa, are you joking?'

The perfumer, like his assistants, had noticed the glances Popinot had given Césarine during dinner; he meant to clear up his suspicions.

'Well, little girl, this hazel-nut is to work a revolution in the house. There will be one less under our roof after to-night.'

Césarine looked straight at her father, as who should say, 'What is that to me?'

'Popinot is going away.'

Although César was a poor observer, although his remark had been meant to prepare the way for the announcement of the new firm of A. Popinot and Company, as well as for a trap for his daughter, his father's tenderness told him the secret of the vague emotions which sprang up in the girl's heart, and blossomed in red upon her cheek and brow, brightening her eyes before they fell. César thought at once that

some word had been exchanged between Césarine and Popinot. Nothing of the kind had happened; the boy and girl understood each other, after the fashion of shy young lovers, without a word.

There are moralists who hold that love is the most involuntary, the most disinterested and least calculating of all passions, a mother's love always excepted, a doctrine which contains a gross error. The larger part of mankind may be ignorant of their motives; but any sympathy, physical or mental, is none the less based upon calculations made by brain or heart or animal instincts. Love is essentially an egoistical affection, and egoism implies profound calculation. For the order of mind which is only impressed by outward and visible results, it may seem an improbable or unusual thing that a poor, lame, red-haired lad should find favour in the eyes of a beautiful girl like Césarine; and yet it was only what might be expected from the workings of the bourgeois mind in matters of sentiment. The explanation would account for other marriages that are a constant source of amazement to onlookers, between tall or beautiful women and insignificant men, or when some well-grown stripling marries some ugly little creature.

For a man afflicted with any physical deformity, be it a club foot, lameness, a hunch-back, excessive ugliness, spot, blemish, or disfigurement, Roguin's infirmity, or other anomalous affection for which his progenitors are not responsible, there are but two courses open; he must either make himself feared, or cultivate an exquisite goodness—he cannot afford to steer an undecided middle course between the two extremes like the rest of humanity. The first alternative requires talent, genius, or force of character; for a man can only inspire terror by his power to do harm, impose respect by his genius, or compel fear by his prodigious wit. In the second he studies to be adored; he lends himself admirably to

feminine tyranny, and is wiser in love than others of irreproachable physical proportions.

Anselme Popinot had been brought up by the good Ragons, upright citizens of the best type, and by his uncle the judge—a course of training which, with his ingenuous and religious nature, had led him to redeem his slight deformity by the perfection of his character. Constance and César, struck by a disposition which makes youth so attractive, had often praised Anselme in Césarine's hearing. With all their narrowness in other respects, this shopkeeper and his wife possessed nobility of soul and hearts that were quick to comprehend. Their praises found an echo in the girl's own heart; in spite of her inexperience, she read in Anselme's frank eyes a passion that is always flattering, no matter what the age, rank, or figure of the lover may be.

Little Popinot, not being a well-shaped man, had all the more reasons for loving a woman. Should she be fair, he would be her lover till his dying day; love would give him ambition; he would work himself to death to make his wife happy; he would suffer her to be the sovereign mistress of his home; and her empire over him would be boundless.

This, crudely stated, is perhaps what Césarine thought, unconsciously within herself; she had had a bird's-eye glimpse of the harvests of love, and she had drawn her own inferences; her mother's happiness was under her eyes, she wished no other life for herself; instinctively she discerned in Anselme another César, polished by education, as she herself had been. In her dreams, Popinot was the mayor of an arrondissement, and she liked to imagine herself asking for subscriptions to charities in her district, as her own mother did in the parish of Saint-Roch. And so at length she forgot that one of Popinot's legs was shorter than the other, and would have been quite capable of asking, 'Does he really limp?' She liked the clear eyes; she liked to see the change that came over them when,

at a glance from her, they lighted up at once with a flash of timid love, and then fell despondently again.

Roguin's head clerk, Alexandre Crottat, gifted with a precocious knowledge of the world, acquired by professional experience, disgusted Césarine with his half-cynical, half-good-natured air, after putting her out of patience with his commonplace talk. Popinot's silence revealed a gentle nature; she liked to watch the half-sad smile with which he endured meaningless trivialities; the babble which made him smile always roused a feeling of annoyance in her; they smiled or looked condolence at each other.

Anselme's mental superiority did not prevent him from working hard with his hands; the way in which he threw himself into everything that he did also pleased Césarine; she guessed that while all the other assistants said, 'Césarine is going to be married to M. Roguin's head clerk,' Anselme, lame and poor and red-haired, did not despair of winning her. The strength of a hope proves the strength of a love.

'Where is he going?' Césarine asked, trying to look indifferent.

'He is going to set up for himself in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants! And, upon my word, by the grace of God!——' But neither his wife nor daughter understood the ejaculation. When Birotteau's mind encountered any difficulty, he behaved like an insect that encounters an obstacle, he swerved to left or right; so now he changed the subject, promising himself to speak of Césarine to his wife.

'I told uncle your notions about Roguin and your fears; he began to laugh,' he went on, addressing Constance.

'You ought never to repeat things that we say between ourselves,' she cried. 'Poor Roguin! he may be the most honest man in the world; he is fifty-eight years old, and I expect he no more thinks——'

She too broke off; she saw that Césarine was listening, and warned César of that fact by a glance.

'So I did well to strike the bargain.'

'Why, you are the master,' returned she.

César took both his wife's hands in his, and kissed her on the forehead. That answer had always been her passive form of assent to her husband's projects. And with that, Birotteau went downstairs into the shop.

'Come!' he cried, speaking to the assistants, 'we will put up the shutters at ten o'clock. We must do a stroke of work, gentlemen! We must set about moving all the furniture from the first floor to the second to-night! We shall have to put the little pots into the big ones, as the saying is, so as to give my architect elbow-room to-morrow.—Popinot has gone out without leave,' said César, looking round. 'Oh! I forgot, he does not sleep here.—He is gone to see about the shop, or else he is putting down M. Vauquelin's ideas,' he thought.

'We know why the furniture is being moved, sir,' said Célestin, spokesman for the two assistants and Raguet, who stood by him. 'May we be allowed to congratulate you on an honour which reflects glory on the whole establishment? . . . Popinot told us——'

'Well, boys, it can't be helped; I have been decorated. So we are inviting a few friends, partly to celebrate the liberation of the soil, and partly on the occasion of my own promotion to the Legion of Honour. It may be that I have shown myself worthy of this signal mark of royal favour by the discharge of my functions at the Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for the Royalist cause—when I was your age, on the steps of Saint-Roch, on the 13th of Vendémiaire; and, on my word, Napoleon the Emperor, as they called him, gave me my wound. For I was wounded, and on the thigh, what is more, and Mme. Ragon nursed me. Be brave, and you will be rewarded! So there, you see, my children, that a mishap is never all loss.'

'People don't fight in the streets nowadays,' said Célestin.

'Well, we must hope,' said César, and thereupon he took occasion to read his assistants a little homily, which he rounded off with an invitation.

The prospect of a dance put new life into the three assistants; under the stimulus of the excitement, the three, with Virginie and Raguet, performed acrobatic feats. They came and went up and down the stairs with their loads, and nothing was broken, nothing was upset. By two o'clock in the morning the removal was accomplished; César and his wife slept on the second floor, Célestin and the second assistant occupied Popinot's room. The third floor was converted, for the time being, into a furniture warehouse.

When the assistants had gone down into the shop after dinner, Popinot, usually so quiet and equable, had been as fidgety as a racehorse just arrived upon the course. A burning desire to do something great was upon him, induced by a superabundance of nervous fluid, which turns the diaphragm of the lover or the man of restless ambition into a furnace.

'What can be the matter with you?' Célestin had asked.

'What a day! I am setting up for myself, my dear fellow,' he whispered in Célestin's ear, 'and M. César is to be decorated.'

'You are very lucky; the governor is helping you,' exclaimed the assistant.

Popinot gave him no answer; he vanished, whirled away by the wind—the wind of success.

'Oh, as to lucky!' said an assistant, as he sorted gloves in dozens, to his neighbour, who was busy checking the prices on the tickets. 'The governor has seen the eyes that Popinot has been making at Mlle. Césarine; he is a shrewd one, the governor, so he is getting rid of Anselme; it would be difficult to refuse outright,

because of the relatives. Célestin takes the trick for generosity.'

Anselme Popinot meanwhile had turned down the Rue Saint-Honoré and hurried along the Rue des Deux-Écus to secure some one in whom his commercial second-sight beheld the principal instrument of success. Judge Popinot had once done a service to this young man, the cleverest commercial traveller in Paris, whose activity and triumphant gift of the gab was to earn for him at a later day the title of 'The Illustrious.' At this time the great commercial traveller was devoting his energies to the hat-trade and the 'fancy-goods line'; he was simply Gaudissart as yet, without the prefix, but at the age of twenty-two he had already distinguished himself; his magnetic influence upon customers was beginning to be recognised. He was thin and bright-eyed at that time; he had an eloquent face, an indefatigable memory, a quick perception of the taste of those with whom he came in contact; he deserved to be, what he afterwards became—the king of commercial travellers, the Frenchman *par excellence.*

Popinot had come across Gaudissart some days previously, and the latter had announced that he was about to go on a journey; the hope of finding him still in Paris had sent Popinot flying down the Rue des Deux-Écus. At the coach-office he learned that the commercial traveller had taken his place. Gaudissart's leave-taking of his beloved city had taken the shape of an evening at the Vaudeville, where there was a new play. Popinot resolved to wait for him. To confide the agency of the hazel-nut oil to this invaluable launcher of commercial enterprises, already courted and cherished by the best houses, was like drawing a bill of exchange on fortune!

Popinot had claims on Gaudissart. The commercial traveller, so skilled in the art of entangling that froward race, the petty country shopkeepers, in his toils, had once

allowed himself to become entangled in a political web, in the first conspiracy against the Bourbons after the Hundred Days; and Gaudissart, to whom open air was a vital necessity, found himself in prison with a capital charge hanging over him. Judge Popinot, the examining magistrate, saw that it was a piece of youthful folly that implicated Gaudissart in the affair, and set him at liberty; but if the young man had chanced upon a magistrate eager to commend himself to the authorities, or upon a rabid Royalist, the luckless pioneer of commerce might have mounted the scaffold. Gaudissart, who knew that he owed his life to the judge, was in despair, because a barren gratitude was all the return he could make; and as it was impossible to thank a judge for doing justice, he had betaken himself to the Ragons, and there sworn fealty to the family of Popinot.

While Popinot waited, he naturally spent the time in going to see his shop in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants once more. He asked for the landlord's address, so as to come to terms with him about the lease. Then, wandering through the murky labyrinth about the Great Market, with his thoughts full of ways and means of making a rapid fortune, Popinot came into the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, and there met with a wonderful and auspicious opportunity, with which César's heart should be gladdened on the morrow. Then he took up his post at the door of the Hôtel du Commerce at the end of the Rue des Deux-Écus; and towards midnight heard, afar off, a voice uplifted in the Rue de Grenelle; it was Gaudissart singing a bit of the last song in the piece, to the accompaniment of the sound of a walking stick, trailed with expression upon the pavement.

'Sir,' cried Anselme, suddenly emerging from the doorway, 'can I have a couple of words with you?'

'Eleven, if you like,' said the other, raising a loaded cane.

'I am Popinot,' said poor Anselme.

'Right,' said Gaudissart, recognising his friend. 'What do you want? Money? Absent on leave, but there is some somewhere. An arm for a duel? I am at your service from heel to head.

"You see him where he stands—
Every inch a Frenchman and a soldier!"'

'Come and have ten minutes' talk with me, not in your room, we might be overheard, but on the Quai de l'Horloge; there is nobody there at this time of night,' said Popinot, 'it is a question of the greatest importance.'

'You are in a hurry, are you? Come along!'

Ten minutes later, Gaudissart, now put in possession of Popinot's secrets, recognised the importance of the matter.

'Approach, ye hairdressers and retail perfumers,' cried Gaudissart, mimicking Lafon in the Cid. 'I will get hold of all the perfumers of France and Navarre. Oh! I have it! I was going away, but I shall stop here now and take agencies from the Parisian perfumery trade.'

'Why?'

'To choke off your competitors, innocent! By taking on their agencies, I can make their perfidious cosmetics drink to their own confusion in your oil, for I shall talk of nothing else and push no other kind. A fine commercial traveller's dodge! Aha! we are the diplomatists of commerce. Famous! As for your prospectus, I will see to it. I have known Andoche Finot since we were boys; his father is a hatter in the Rue du Coq, the old fellow started me; it was through him that I began to travel in the hat line. Andoche is a very clever fellow; he has the cleverness of all the heads that his father ever fitted with hats. He is in the literary line; he does the minor theatres for the *Courrier des Spectacles*. His father, an old fox, has abundant reason for not liking cleverness; he doesn't believe in cleverness; it is impossible to make him see

that cleverness will sell, and that a young man of spirit can make a fortune by his wits; indeed, as to spirit, the only spirit he approves of is proof-spirit. Old Finot is reducing young Finot by famine. Andoche can do anything, and he is my friend moreover, and I don't rub against fools (except in the way of business). Finot does mottoes for the *Fidèle Berger*, which pays him, while the newspapers, for which he works like a galley-slave, snub him right and left. How jealous they are in that line! It is just like it is in the fancy article trade.

'Finot wrote a splendid one-act comedy for Mlle. Mars, the greatest of the great. (Ah! there's a woman that I admire!) Well, and to see it put on the stage at all, he had to take it to the Gaité. Andoche understands prospectuses; he enters into a man's ideas about business, he is not proud, he will block out our prospectus *gratis*. Goodness! we will treat him to a bowl of punch and little cakes; for, no nonsense, Popinot; I will travel for you without commission or expenses; your competitors shall pay me, I will bamboozle them. Let us understand each other clearly. The success of this thing is a point of honour with me; my reward shall be to be best-man at your wedding! I will go to Italy, Germany, and England! I will take placards in every language with me, and have them posted up everywhere, in the villages, at church doors, and in all the good situations that I know in country towns! The oil shall make a blaze; it shall be on every head! Ah! your marriage will not be a marriage in water-colours; it shall be done in oils! You shall have your Césarine, or I am not "The Illustrious," a nickname old Finot gave me because I made a success of his grey hats. I shall be sticking to my own line, too, the human head; oil and hats, as is well known, are meant to preserve the hair of the public.'

Popinot went to his aunt's house, where he was to spend the night, in such a fever, brought on by visions

of success, that the streets seemed to him to be rivers of oil. He scarcely slept at all, dreamed that his hair was growing at a furious rate, and beheld two angels, who unrolled above his head a scroll (as in a pantomime), whereon the words *Cesarian Oil* were written; and he awoke, but remembered his dream, and determined to give the name to the oil of hazel-nuts. He saw the will of heaven revealed in this fancy.

César and Popinot were both at the factory in the Faubourg du Temple long before the hazel-nuts arrived. While they waited for Mme. Madou's porters, Popinot in high glee told the history of his treaty of alliance with Gaudissart.

'We have the illustrious Gaudissart for us; we shall be millionaires!' cried the perfumer, holding out a hand to his cashier, with the air of a Louis XIV. receiving a Maréchal de Villars after Denain.

'And yet another thing,' said the happy assistant, drawing a bottle from his pocket, a gourd-shaped flask, flattened so as to present several sides. 'I have found ten thousand bottles like this one, ready made and washed, at four sous and six months' credit.'

'Anselme,' said Birotteau, beholding this marvel, 'yesterday' (here his voice grew solemn), 'yesterday, in the garden of the Tuileries—yes, no longer ago than yesterday, your words to me were, "I shall succeed." To-day, I myself say to you, "You will succeed!" Four sous! Six months! An entirely new shape! Macassar is shaking in his shoes; what a deathblow for Macassar! What a good thing that I have bought up all the nuts I could lay my hands on in Paris! But where did you find these bottles?'

'I was waiting to speak to Gaudissart, and sauntering about——'

'Just as I once did,' exclaimed Birotteau.

'And as I went down the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, I

saw a wholesale glass merchant's place, a dealer in bell-glasses and glass shades, who has a very large stock; I saw this bottle—— Oh! it stared me in the face like a flash of light; something said, "Here is the thing for you!"'

'A born merchant! He shall have my daughter,' muttered César.

'In I went, and saw thousands of the bottles standing there in boxes.'

'Did you ask him about them?'

'You do not think me such a ninny!' cried Anselme, grieved at the thought.

'Born merchant!' repeated Birotteau.

'I went in to ask for glass shades for little wax statuettes. While I was bargaining for the glass shades, I found fault with the shape of these bottles. That led to a general confession; my bottle merchant went from one thing to another, and told me that Faille and Bouchot, who failed lately, were about to bring out a cosmetic, and wanted an out-of-the-way shape. He distrusted them; he wanted half the money down; Faille and Bouchot, hoping for a success, parted with the money, and the failure came out while the bottles were being made. When they put in a claim to the trustees for the rest, the trustees compromised the matter by leaving them with all the bottles and half the money that had been paid, as an indemnity for goods which they said were absurdly shaped, and impossible to dispose of. The bottles cost him eight sous, and he would be glad to let any one have them for four. He might have them on his hands for Heaven knew how long; there was no sale for such a shape. "Will you engage to supply ten thousand at four sous? I can take the bottles off your hands; I am M. Birotteau's assistant." And so I opened up the subject, and drew him out, led him on, and put pressure on my man, and he is ours.'

'Four sous!' said Birotteau. 'Do you know that we

can bring out the oil at three francs, and make thirty sous, leaving twenty to the retailers?'

'The Cesarian Oil!' cried Popinot.

'Cesarian Oil? . . . Ah, master lover, you have a mind to flatter father and daughter. Very well; let it be Cesarian Oil if you like. The Cæsars conquered the world; they must have had famous heads of hair.'

'Cæsar was bald,' said Popinot.

'Because he did not use our oil, people will say. The Cesarian Oil at three francs; Macassar Oil costs twice as much. Gaudissart is in it; we shall make a hundred thousand francs a year, for we will set down all heads that respect themselves for a dozen bottles every twelvemonth; eighteen francs of profit! Say there are eighteen thousand heads—a hundred and forty-four thousand francs. We shall be millionaires.'

When the hazel-nuts arrived, Raguet and the workpeople, with Popinot and César, cracked the shells, and a sufficient quantity was pressed. In four hours' time they had several pounds weight of oil. Popinot took some of it to Vauquelin, who presented him with a formula for diluting the essential oil with a less expensive medium and for perfuming it. Popinot straightway took steps for taking out a patent for the invention and the improvement. It was Popinot's ambition to pay his share of the expense of starting the enterprise, and the devoted Gaudissart lent the money for the deposit.

Prosperity has an intoxicating effect, which always turns weak heads. One result of this uplifted state of mind is readily foreseen. Grindot came. He brought with him a sketch in water-colours of a charming interior, the design for the future rooms when furnished. Birotteau was carried away by it. He agreed to everything, and the workmen began at once; every stroke of the pick-axe drew groans from the house, and from Constance. The painter, M. Lourdois, a very wealthy contractor, who engaged to leave nothing undone, talked of

gilding the drawing-room. Constance interposed at this.

'M. Lourdois,' said she, 'you have thirty thousand francs a year of your own; you live in your own house, and you can do what you like in it; but for people like us——'

'Madame, commerce ought to shine; it should not suffer itself to be eclipsed by the aristocracy. Besides, here is M. Birotteau in the Government; he is a public man——'

'Yes, but he is still in the shop,' said Constance aloud, before the assistants and her five auditors; 'neither he, nor I, nor his friends, nor his enemies will forget that.'

Birotteau raised himself on tiptoe several times, with his hands clasped behind his back.

'My wife is right,' said he. 'We will be modest in prosperity. Besides, so long as a man is in business, he ought to be careful of his expenses, and to keep them within bounds; indeed, he is bound by law not to indulge in "excessive expenditure." If the enlargement of my premises, and the amount spent on the alterations, exceeds a certain limit, it would be imprudent in me to go beyond it; you yourself would blame me, Lourdois. The quarter has its eyes upon me; successful people are looked upon jealously and envied.—Ah! you will soon know that, young man,' he said, addressing Grindot; 'if they slander us, at any rate let us give them no cause to say evil of us.'

'Neither slander nor spite can touch you,' said Lourdois; 'your position makes an exception of you; and you have had such a great experience of business, that you know how to keep your affairs within due limits. You are shrewd.'

'I have had some experience of business, it is true; do you know the reason why we are enlarging our house? If I exact a heavy penalty to secure punctuality it is——'

'No.'

'Well, then, my wife and I are inviting a few friends, partly to celebrate the liberation of the soil, partly on the occasion of my promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honour.'

'What, what?' cried Lourdois. 'Have they given you the Cross?'

'Yes. It may be that I have shown myself worthy of this signal mark of Royal favour by discharging my functions at the Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for the Royalist cause on the 13th of Vendémiaire at Saint-Roch, when I was wounded by Napoleon. Will you come and bring your wife and your young lady——?'

'Enchanted by the honour you condescend to bestow upon me,' said Lourdois, a Liberal. 'But you are a droll fellow, Birotteau; you mean to make sure that I shall keep my word, and that is why you ask me to come. Well, well; I will set my best workmen on to it; we will have roaring fires to dry the paint and use drying processes, for it will not do to dance in a room full of steam from the damp plaster. The surface shall be varnished, so that there shall be no smell.'

Three days later, the announcement of Birotteau's forthcoming ball created a flutter in the commercial world of that quarter. And not only so, every one could see for himself the timber props, necessitated by the hurried alteration of the staircase, and the square wooden shaft holes, through which the rubbish was shot into the carts beneath. The men in their haste worked by torchlight, for they had a night-and-day shift, and this collected idlers and inquisitive gazers in the street. On such preparations as these, the gossip of the neighbourhood reared sumptuous fabrics of conjecture.

On the Sunday, when the documents relative to the building land were to be signed, M. and Mme. Ragon,

and uncle Pillerault, came at four o'clock, after vespers. César said that as the house was so much pulled to pieces, he could only ask Charles Claparon, Roguin, and Crottat for that day. The notary brought a copy of the *Journal des Débats*, in which M. de la Billardière had inserted the following paragraph :—

'We hear that the liberation of the soil will be celebrated with enthusiasm throughout France; but, in Paris, the members of the municipal administration have felt that the time had come for reviving the splendour of the capital, which has been eclipsed during the foreign occupation from a feeling of patriotism. Each of the mayors and deputy-mayors proposes to give a ball, so that the winter season promises to be a very brilliant one, and the National movement will be followed up. Among the many fêtes about to take place is the much-talked-of ball to be given by M. Birotteau, recently nominated for the Legion of Honour, and so widely known for his devotion to the Royalist cause. M. Birotteau, wounded in the affair of Saint-Roch on the 13th of Vendémiaire, and one of the most highly respected judges of the Consular Tribunal, has doubly deserved this distinction.'

'How well they write nowadays!' exclaimed César. —'They are talking about us in the paper,' he added, turning to Pillerault.

'Well, and what of that?' returned the uncle, who particularly detested the *Journal des Débats*.

'Perhaps the paragraph may sell some of the Pâte des Sultanes and the Toilet Lotion,' said Mme. César in a low voice to Mme. Ragon. Mme. Birotteau did not share her husband's exhilaration.

Mme. Ragon, a tall, thin woman, with a sharp nose and thin lips, looked a very fair imitation of a marquise of the *ancien régime*. A somewhat wide margin of red

encircled her eyes, as sometimes happens with aged women who have known many troubles. Her fine austere face, in spite of its kindliness, was dignified, and there was moreover a quaint something about her which struck beholders, yet did not excite a smile, a something interpreted by her manner and her dress. She wore mittens; she carried in all weathers a cane umbrella, such as Marie Antoinette used at the Trianon; her favourite colour was that particular pale shade of brown known as *feuille-morte;* her skirts hung from her waist in folds, which will never be seen again, for the dowager ladies of a bygone day have taken their secret with them. Mme. Ragon had not given up the black mantilla bordered with square-meshed black lace; the ornaments in her old-fashioned caps reminded you of the filagree work on old picture-frames. She took snuff with the dainty neatness and the little gestures which a younger generation may recall, if they have been so fortunate as to see their great-aunt or grandmother solemnly set her gold snuff-box on the table beside her, and shake the stray grains from her fichu.

The Sieur Ragon was a little man, five feet high at the most, with a countenance of the nutcracker type. Two eyes were visible, two prominent cheek-bones, a nose, and a chin. As he had lost his teeth, he mumbled half his words, but he talked like a brook, politely, somewhat pompously, and always with a smile—the same smile with which he had greeted the fair ladies of quality whom one chance or another brought to his shop. His hair, tightly scraped back from his forehead and powdered, described a snowy half-moon on his head, with a pair of 'pigeon's wings' on either side of a neat queue tied with ribbon. He wore a cornflower-blue coat, a white waistcoat, silk breeches and stockings, black silk gloves, and shoes with gold buckles to them. The most peculiar thing about him was his habit of walking out in the street hat in hand. He looked rather like a messenger

of the Chamber of Peers, or some usher-in-waiting at the palace—one of those attendant satellites of some great power, which shine with a reflected glory, and remain intrinsically insignificant.

'Well, Birotteau,' he remarked, and from his tone he might have been addressing an assistant, 'are you sorry now, my boy, that you took our advice in those days? Did we ever doubt the gratitude of our beloved royal family?'

'You must be very happy, my dear,' said Mme. Ragon, addressing Mme. Birotteau.

'Yes, indeed,' returned the fair Constance, who always fell under the charm of that cane umbrella, those butterfly caps, those tight-fitting sleeves, and the ample fichu *à la Julie* that Mme. Ragon wore.

'Césarine looks charming.—Come here, pretty child,' said Mme. Ragon. She spoke in a patronising manner, and with a high head-voice.

'Shall we settle the business before dinner?' asked uncle Pillerault.

'We are waiting for M. Claparon,' said Roguin; 'he was dressing when I left him.'

'M. Roguin,' César began, 'does he quite understand that we are to dine in a wretched little *entre-sol*——'

('Sixteen years ago he thought it magnificent,' murmured Constance.)

'Among the rubbish, and with all the workmen about?'

'Pooh! you will find him a good fellow, and not hard to please,' said Roguin.

'I have left Raguet to look after the shop; we cannot come in and out of our own door now; as you have seen, it has all been pulled down,' César returned.

'Why did you not bring your nephew?' asked Pillerault of Mme. Ragon.

'Shall we see him later?' suggested Césarine.

'No, darling,' said Mme. Ragon. 'Anselme, dear

boy, is working himself to death. I am afraid of that close street where the sun never shines, that vile-smelling Rue des Cinq-Diamants; the gutter is always black or blue or green. I am afraid he may die there. But when young people set their minds upon anything——!' she said, turning to Césarine with a gesture that interpreted 'mind' as 'heart.'

'Then, has the lease been signed?' asked César.

'Yesterday, before a notary,' Ragon replied. 'He has taken the place for eighteen years, but he pays the rent six months in advance.'

'Well, M. Ragon, are you satisfied with me?' Birotteau asked. 'I have given him the secret of a new discovery—in fact!'

'We know you by heart, César,' said little Ragon, taking César's hands, and pressing them with devout friendliness.

Roguin meanwhile was not without inward qualms. Claparon was about to appear on the scene, and his habits and manner of talking might be something of a shock to these respectable citizens. He thought it necessary to prepare their minds, and spoke, addressing Ragon, Pillerault, and the women.

'You will see an eccentric character,' he said; 'he hides his talents beneath shocking bad manners; his ideas have raised him from a very low position. No doubt he will acquire better tastes in the society of bankers. You might come across him slouching half-fuddled along the boulevard, or in a café playing at billiards: he looks like a great hulking idiot.—But nothing of the kind; he is thinking all the time, pondering how to put life into trade by new ideas.'

'I can understand that,' said Birotteau; 'my best ideas came to me while I was sauntering about, didn't they, dear?'

'Claparon makes up for lost time at night, after spending the daytime in meditating over business com-

binations. All these very clever people lead queer inexplicable lives,' Roguin continued. 'Well, with all his desultory ways, he gains his end, as I can testify. He made all the owners of our building land give way at last; they were not willing, they demurred at this and that; he mystified them—tired them out; day after day he went to see them, and this time the lots are ours.'

A peculiar sounding *broum! broum!* characteristic of drinkers of strong waters and spirits, announced the arrival of the most grotesque personage in this story—who was in the future to enact the part of the arbiter of César's destinies. The perfumer hurried down the narrow, dark staircase, partly to tell Raguet to close the shop, partly to make his excuses for receiving Claparon in the dining-room.

'Eh, what? Oh, it will do very well for stowing the vict——, I mean for doing business in.'

In spite of Roguin's skilful opening, the entrance of the sham great banker at once produced an unpleasant impression upon those well-bred citizens, M. and Mme. Roguin, upon the observant Pillerault, and upon Césarine and her mother.

At the age of twenty-eight, or thereabouts, the former commercial traveller had not a hair on his head, and wore a wig of corkscrew curls. Such a manner of dressing the hair demands a girlish freshness, a milk-white skin, and the daintiest feminine charm; so it brought out all the vulgarity of a pimpled countenance, a dark-red complexion, flushed like that of a stage coachman, and covered with premature wrinkles and deeply-cut grotesque lines which told of a dissolute life; its ill effects could be read only too plainly in the bad state of his teeth and the black specks dotted over the shrivelled skin.

There was something about Claparon that suggested the provincial actor who frequents fairs, and is prepared to play any and every part, to whose worn, shrunken

cheeks and flabby lips the paint refuses to adhere; the tongue always wagging even when the man is drunk; the shameless eyes, the compromising gestures. Such a face as this, lighted up by the hilarious flames of punch, little befitted a man accustomed to important business. Indeed, only after prolonged and necessary studies in mimicry had Claparon succeeded in adopting a manner not wholly out of keeping with his supposed importance. Du Tillet had assisted personally at Claparon's toilette, anxious as a nervous manager over the first appearance of his principal actor, for he trembled lest the vicious habits of a reckless life should appear through the veneer of the banker.

'Say as little as you can,' said his mentor; 'a banker never babbles; he acts, thinks, meditates, listens, and ponders. So, to look like a real banker, you must either not speak at all, or say insignificant things. Keep those ribald eyes of yours quiet; look solemn at the risk of looking stupid. In politics, be for the Government, but keep to generalities, such as—"There is a heavy budget; compromise as parties stand is out of the question; Liberalism is dangerous; the Bourbons ought to avoid all collisions; Liberalism is a cloak to hide the schemes of the Coalition; the Bourbons are inaugurating an epoch of prosperity, so let us give them our support, whether we are well affected to them or not; France has had enough of political experiments," and the like. And don't sprawl over all the tables; remember that you have to sustain the dignity of a millionaire. Don't snort like a pensioner when you take snuff; play with your snuff-box, and look at your boots or at the ceiling before you give an answer; look as wise as you can, in fact. Above all things, rid yourself of your unlucky habit of fingering everything. In society a banker ought to look as if he were glad to let his fingers rest. And look here! you work at night, you are stupid with making calculations, there are so many things to consider in the

starting of an enterprise! so much thinking is involved! Grumble, above all things, and say that trade is very bad. Trade is dull, slow, hard to move, perplexing. Keep to that, and let particulars alone. Don't begin to sing drolleries of Béranger's at table, and don't drink too much; you will ruin your prospects if you get tipsy. Roguin will keep an eye on you; you are going among moral people, respectable, steady-going folk, don't frighten them by letting out some of your pot-house principles.'

This homily produced on Charles Claparon's mind an effect very similar to the strange sensation of his new suit of clothes. The rollicking prodigal, hail-fellow-well-met with everybody, accustomed to the comfortable, disreputable garments in which his outer man was as much at home as his thoughts in the language that clothed them, held himself upright, stiff as a poker in the new clothes for which the tailor had kept him waiting to the last minute, and was as ill at ease in his movements as in this new phraseology. He put out a hand unthinkingly towards a flask or a box, then, hurriedly recollecting himself, drew it in again, and in the same way he began a sentence and stopped short in the middle, distinguishing himself by a ludicrous incoherence, which did not escape the observant Pillerault. His round face, like the rakish-looking corkscrew ringlets of his wig, were totally out of keeping with his manner, and he seemed to think one thing and say another. But the good folk concluded that his inconsequence was the result of preoccupation.

'He does so much business,' said Roguin.

'Business has given him very little breeding,' Mme. Ragon said to Césarine.

M. Roguin overheard her, and laid a finger on his lips. 'He is rich, clever, and honourable to a fault,' he said, bending to Mme. Ragon.

'He may be excused something for such qualities as those,' said Pillerault to Ragon.

'Let us read over the papers before dinner,' said Roguin. 'We are alone.'

Mme. Ragon, Césarine, and Constance left the contracting parties, Pillerault, Ragon, César, Roguin, and Claparon, to listen to the reading of the documents by Alexandre Crottat. César signed a mortgage bond for forty thousand francs secured on the land and the factory in the Faubourg du Temple (the money had been lent by one of Roguin's clients); he paid over to Roguin Pillerault's order on the bank, gave (without taking a receipt) twenty thousand francs worth of bills from his portfolio, and drew another bill for the remaining hundred and forty thousand francs on Charles Claparon.

'I have no receipt to give you,' said that gentleman. 'You are acting for your own side with M. Roguin, as we are doing for our share. Our vendors will receive their money from him in coin; I only undertake to complete your payment by paying a hundred and forty thousand francs for your bills——'

'That is right,' said Pillerault.

'Well, then, gentlemen, let us call in the ladies again, for it is cold without them,' said Claparon, with a look at Roguin to see whether he had gone too far.

'Ladies! . . . Ah! mademoiselle is your young lady, of course,' said Claparon, looking at Birotteau, and straightening himself up. 'Well, well, you are not a bungler. Not one of the roses that you have distilled can be compared with her, and perhaps it is because you have distilled roses that——'

'Faith!' said Roguin, interrupting him, 'I own that I am hungry.'

'Very well, let us have dinner,' said Birotteau.

'We are to have dinner in the presence of a notary,' said Claparon, with an important air.

'You do a great deal of business, do you not?' said Pillerault, purposely seating himself next to the banker.

'A tremendous amount, wholesale,' replied Claparon;

'but trade is dull, hard to move—there are canals now. Oh, canals! You have no idea how busy we are with canals. That is comprehensible. The Government wants canals. A canal is a want generally felt. All the trade of a department is interested in a canal, you know! A stream, said Pascal, is a moving highway. The next thing is a market, and markets depend on embankments, for there are a frightful lot of embankments, and the embankments interest the poorer classes, and that means a loan, which finally benefits the poor! Voltaire said, "*Canal, canard, canaille!*" But Government depends for information on its own engineers; it is difficult to meddle in the matter, at least, it is difficult to come to an understanding with them; for the Chamber—— Oh! sir, the Chamber gives us trouble! The Chamber does not want to grapple with the political question hidden beneath the financial question. There is bad faith on all sides. Would you believe this? There are the Kellers—well, then, François Keller is a public speaker, he attacks the measures of the Government as to the funds and canals. He comes home, and then my fine gentleman finds us with our propositions; they are favourable, and he has to make it up with the aforesaid Government, which he attacked so insolently an hour ago. The interests of the public speaker clash with the interests of the banker; we are between two fires. Now you understand how thorny affairs become; you have to satisfy everybody—the clerks, the people in the chambers, and the people in the ante-chambers, and the Ministers——'

'The Ministers?' asked Pillerault, who wished to probe this partner's mind thoroughly.

'Yes, sir, the Ministers.'

'Well, then, the newspapers are right,' said Pillerault.

'Here is uncle on politics,' said Birotteau; 'M. Claparon has set him off.'

'Newspapers!' said Claparon, 'there are some more confounded humbugs! Newspapers throw us all into

confusion; they do us a good turn now and then, but the cruel nights they make me spend! I would as lief be without them; they are the ruin of my eyes in fact, poring over them and working out calculations.'

'But to return to the Ministers,' said Pillerault, hoping for revelations.

'Ministers have exigencies which are purely governmental.—But what am I eating; is it ambrosia?' asked Claparon, interrupting himself. 'Here is a sort of sauce that you only have in citizens' houses; you never get it at grub-shops——'

At that word, the ornaments on Mme. Ragon's cap skipped like rams. Claparon gathered that the expression was low, and tried to retrieve his error.

'That is what the heads of large banking firms call the high-class taverns—Véry, and the Frères Provençaux. Well, neither those vile grub-shops, nor our most accomplished cooks, make you a soft, mellow sauce; some give you water with lemon-juice in it, and others give you chemical concoctions.'

The conversation at dinner chiefly consisted in attacks from Pillerault, who tried to plumb his man, and only found emptiness; he looked upon him as a dangerous person.

'It is going on all right,' said Roguin in Charles Claparon's ear.

'Oh! I shall get out of my clothes to-night, I suppose,' answered Claparon, who was gasping for breath.

'We are obliged to use our dining-room as a sitting-room, sir,' said Birotteau, 'because we are looking forward to a little gathering of our friends in eighteen days' time, partly to celebrate the liberation of the soil——'

'Right, sir; I myself am also for the Government. My political convictions incline me to the *statu quo* of the

great man who guides the destinies of the house of Austria, a fine fellow! Keep what you have, to get more; and, in the first place, get more, to keep what you have.—So now you know the bottom of my opinions, which have the honour to be those of Prince Metternich!'

'Partly on the occasion of my promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honour,' César went on.

'Why, yes, I know. Now who was telling me about that? Was it the Kellers, or Nucingen?'

Roguin, amazed at so much presence of mind, signified his admiration.

'Oh, no; it was at the Chamber.'

'At the Chamber. Was it M. de la Billardière?' asked César.

'The very man.'

'He is charming,' said César, addressing his uncle.

'He pours out talk, talk, talk, till you are drowned in talk,' said Pillerault.

'It may be,' resumed Birotteau, 'that I have shown myself worthy of this favour——'

'By your achievements in perfumery; the Bourbons know how to reward merit of every kind. Ah! let us stand by our generous legitimate Princes, to whom we shall owe unheard-of prosperity about to be.—For, you may be sure of it, the Restoration feels that she must enter the lists with the Empire, and the Restoration will make peaceful conquests; you will see conquests! . . .'

'You will no doubt honour us by coming to our ball, sir,' said Mme. César.

'To spend an evening with you, madame, I would miss a chance of making millions.'

'He certainly is a babbler,' said César in his uncle's ear.

While the waning glory of the *Queen of Roses* was about to shed abroad its parting rays, a faint star was

rising above the commercial horizon; at that very hour, little Popinot was laying the foundations of his fortune in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants. The Rue des Cinq-Diamants, a short, narrow thoroughfare, where loaded waggons can scarcely pass each other, runs between the Rue des Lombards and the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, into which it opens just opposite the end of the Rue Quincampoix, that street so famous in the history of France and of old Paris.

In spite of this narrowness, the near neighbourhood of the druggists' quarter made the place convenient; and from that point of view, Popinot had not made a bad choice. The house (the second from the end nearest the Rue des Lombards) was so dark, that at times it was necessary to work by artificial light in the daytime. Popinot had taken possession the evening before of all its darkest and most unsavoury recesses. His predecessor, a dealer in treacle and raw sugars, had left his mark on the place; the walls, the yard, and the storehouse bore unmistakable traces of his occupation.

Imagine a large and roomy shop, and huge doors barred with iron and painted dragon-green, the solid iron scroll-work, with bolt heads as large as mushrooms by way of ornament. The shop was adorned and protected, as bakers' shops used to be, by wire-work lattices, which bulged at the bottom, and was paved with great slabs of white stone, cracked for the most part. The walls of a guard-house are not yellower nor barer. Further on came the back-shop and kitchen, which looked out into the yard; and behind these again a second storeroom, which must at one time have been a stable. An inside staircase had been contrived in the back-shop, by which you gained two rooms that looked out upon the street; here Popinot meant to have his counting-house and his ledgers. Above the warehouse there were three small rooms, all backed against the party-wall, and lighted by windows on the side of the yard. It was in

these dilapidated rooms that Popinot proposed to live.

The view from the windows was shut in by the high walls that rose about the dingy, crooked yard, walls so damp that even in the driest weather they looked as if they had been newly distempered. The cracks in the paving-stones were choked with black, malodorous filth, deposited there during the tenancy of the dealer in treacle and raw sugars. So much for the outlook. As to the rooms themselves, only one of them boasted a fireplace; the floors were of brick, the walls were unpapered.

Gaudissart and Popinot had been busy there ever since the morning, putting up a cheap wall-paper with their own hands in the ugly room; a journeyman paperhanger whom Gaudissart ferreted out had varnished it for them. The furniture consisted of a student's mattress, a wooden bedstead painted red, a rickety nightstand, a venerable chest of drawers, a table, a couple of armchairs, and half-a-dozen ordinary chairs, a present from Popinot the judge to his nephew. Gaudissart had put a cheap pier-glass over the chimney-piece. It was almost eight o'clock in the evening, and the two friends, sitting before a blazing fire, were about to discuss the remains of their breakfast.

'Away with the cold mutton! It is out of character in a house-warming,' cried Gaudissart.

Popinot held up his last twenty-franc piece, which was to pay for the prospectus. 'But I——' he began.

'I? . . .' retorted Gaudissart, sticking a forty-franc piece into his eye.

A knock at the street door reverberated through the yard. It was Sunday, the workpeople were taking their holiday away from their workshops, and the idle echoes greeted every sound.

'There is my trusty man from the Rue de la Poterie,'

Gaudissart went on. 'For my own part, it is not simply "I," but "I have."'

And, in fact, a waiter appeared, followed by two kitchen boys, carrying between them three wicker baskets, containing a dinner, and crowned by six bottles of wine selected with discrimination.

'But how are we to eat such a lot of things?' asked Popinot.

'There is the man of letters,' cried Gaudissart. 'Finot understands the pomps and vanities. The artless youth will be here directly with a prospectus fit to make your hair stand on end (neat that, eh?), and prospectuses are always dry work. You must water the seeds if you mean to have flowers.—Here, minions,' he added, striking an attitude for the benefit of the kitchen-boys, 'here's gold for you.'

He held out six sous with a gesture worthy of his idol, Napoleon.

'Thank you, M. Gaudissart,' said the scullions, more pleased with the joke than with the money.

'As for thee, my son,' he continued, turning to the waiter who remained, 'there is a portress here. She crouches in the depths of a cave, where at times she does some cooking, as erewhile Nausicaa did the washing, simply by way of relaxation. Hie thee to her, work on her trustful nature; interest her, young man, in the temperature of thy hot dishes. Say to her that she shall be blessed, and above all things respected, highly respected, by Felix Gaudissart, son of Jean-François Gaudissart, and grandson of Gaudissart, vile proletaries of remote lineage, his ancestors. Off with you, and act in such a sort that everything shall be good; for if it isn't, I will make you laugh on the wrong side of your face.

There was another knock at the door.

'That is the ingenious Andoche,' said Gaudissart.

A stout young fellow suddenly entered. He had

somewhat chubby cheeks, was of middle height, and from head to foot looked like the hatter's son. A certain shrewdness lurked beneath the air of constraint that sat on his rounded features. The habitual dejection of a man who is tired of poverty left him, and a hilarious expression crossed his countenance, at the sight of the preparations on the table and the significant seals on the bottle corks. At Gaudissart's shout, a twinkle came into the pale-blue eyes, the big head, on which a Kalmuck physiognomy had been carved, rolled from side to side, and he gave Popinot a distant greeting, in which there was neither servility nor respect, like a man who feels out of his element and stands on his dignity.

Finot was just beginning to discover that he had no sort of talent for literature; he did not think of quitting his calling; he meant to exploit literature by raising himself on the shoulders of men who possessed the talent which he lacked. Instead of doing ill-paid work himself, he would turn his business capacities to account. He was just at the turning-point; he had exhausted the expedients of humility; he had experienced to the full the humiliations of failure; and, like those who take a wide outlook over the financial world, he resolved to change his tactics, and to be insolent in future. He needed capital in the first instance, and Gaudissart had opened out a prospect of making the money by putting Popinot's oil before the public.

'You will make his arrangements with the newspapers,' Gaudissart had said, 'but don't swindle him; if you do, there will be a duel to the death between us; give him value for his money!'

Popinot looked uneasily at the 'author.' Your true man of business regards an author with mixed feelings, in which alarm and curiosity are blended with compassion; and though Popinot had been well educated, his relations' attitude of mind and ways of thinking, together with a

course of drudgery in a shop, had produced their effect on his intelligence, and he bent beneath the yoke of use and wont. You can see this by noticing the metamorphoses which ten years will effect among a hundred boys, who when they left school or college were almost exactly alike.

Andoche mistook the impression which he had made for admiration.

'Very well. Let us run through the prospectus before dinner, then it will be off our minds, and we can drink,' said Gaudissart. 'It is uncomfortable to read after dinner; the tongue is digesting too.'

'Sir,' said Popinot, 'a prospectus often means a whole fortune.'

'And for nobodies like me,' said Andoche, 'fortune is nothing but a prospectus.'

'Ah! very good,' said Gaudissart. 'That droll fellow of an Andoche has wit enough for the Forty.'

'For a hundred,' said Popinot, awestruck with the idea.

Gaudissart snatched up the manuscript, and read aloud, and with emphasis, the first two words—'Cephalic Oil!'

'I like Cesarian Oil better,' said Popinot.

'You don't know them in the provinces, my friend,' said Gaudissart. 'There is a surgical operation known by that name, and they are so stupid, that they will think your oil is meant to facilitate childbirth; and if they start off with the notion, it would be too hard work to bring them all the way back to hair again.'

'Without defending the name,' observed the author, 'I would call your attention to the fact that Cephalic Oil means oil for the head, and resumes your ideas.'

'Go on!' said Popinot impatiently.

And here follows a second historical document, a prospectus, which even at this day is circulating by thousands among retail perfumers.

GOLD MEDAL, PARIS 1824[1]

CEPHALIC OIL

(Improved Patent).

No cosmetic can make the hair grow; and in the same way, it cannot be dyed by chemical preparations without danger to the seat of the intelligence. Science has recently proclaimed that the hair is not a living substance, and that there is no means of preventing it from blanching or falling out. To prevent xerasia and baldness, the bulb at the roots should be preserved from all atmospheric influences, and the natural temperature of the head evenly maintained. The *Cephalic Oil*, based on these principles established by the Royal Academy of Sciences, induces the important result so highly prized by the ancients, the Romans and Greeks, and the nations of the North—a fine head of hair. Learned research has brought to light the fact that the nobles of olden times, who were distinguished by their long, flowing locks, used no other means than these; their recipe, long lost, has been ingeniously rediscovered by A. POPINOT, inventor of *Cephalic Oil*.

To preserve the glands, and not to provoke an impossible or hurtful stimulation of the dermis which contains them, is, therefore, the function of *Cephalic Oil*. This oil, which exhales a delicious fragrance, prevents the exfoliation of the pellicle; while the substances of which it is composed (the essential oil of the hazel-nut being the principal element) counteract the effects of atmospheric air upon the head, thus preventing chills, catarrh, and all unpleasant encephalic affections by maintaining the natural temperature. In this manner the glands, which contain the hair-producing secretions, are never attacked by heat or cold. A fine head of hair—that glorious product so highly valued by either sex—may be retained to extreme old age by the use of *Cephalic Oil*, which imparts to the hair the brilliancy, silkiness, and gloss which constitutes the charm of children's heads.

Directions for use are issued on the wrapper of every bottle.

[1] The next 'Quinquennial Exhibition.'

DIRECTIONS FOR USE

It is perfectly useless to apply oil to the hair itself: besides being an absurd superstition, it is an obnoxious practice, for the cosmetic leaves its traces everywhere.

It is only necessary to part the hair with a comb, and to apply the oil to the roots every morning with a small, fine sponge, proceeding thus until the whole surface of the skin has received a slight application, the hair having been previously combed and brushed.

To prevent spurious imitations, each bottle bears the signature of the inventor. Sold at the price of THREE FRANCS by A. POPINOT, Rue des Cinq-Diamants, Quartier des Lombards, Paris.

It is particularly requested that all communications by post should be prepaid.

Note.—A. POPINOT also supplies essences and pharmaceutical preparations, such as neroli, oil of spike-lavender, oil of sweet almonds, cacao-butter, cafeine, castor oil, *et cætera.*

'My dear fellow,' said the Illustrious Gaudissart, addressing Finot, 'it is perfectly written! Ye gods, how we plunge into deep science! No shuffling; we go straight to the point! Ah! I congratulate you heartily; there is literature of some practical use!'

'A fine prospectus!' cried Popinot enthusiastically.

'The very first sentence is a deathblow to Macassar,' said Gaudissart, rising to his feet with a magisterial air, to proclaim with an oratorical gesture between each word, 'You—cannot—make—hair—grow.—It—cannot—be—dyed—without—danger!' Aha! success lies in that. Modern science corroborates the custom of the ancients. You can suit yourself to old and young. You have to do with an old man.—Aha, sir! the Greeks and Romans, the ancients, were in the right; they were not such fools as some would make them out to be! Or if it is a young man.—My dear fellow, another discovery due to the progress of enlightenment; we are progressing. What must we not expect from steam, and the telegraph, and such like inventions? This oil is the outcome of M. Vauquelin's investigations!—How

if we were to print an extract from M. Vauquelin's paper, eh? Capital! Come, Finot, draw up your chair! Let us stow the victuals, and tipple down the champagne to our young friend's success!'

'It seemed to me,' said the author modestly, 'that the time for the light and playful prospectus has gone by; we are entering on an epoch of science, and must talk learnedly and authoritatively to make an impression on the public.'

'We will push the oil. My feet, and my tongue too, are hankering to go. I have agencies for all the houses that deal in hairdressers' goods, not one of them gives more than thirty per cent. of discount; make up your mind to give forty, and I will engage to sell a hundred thousand bottles in six months. I will make a set on all the druggists, grocers, and hairdressers! And if you will allow them forty per cent. on your oil, they will all send their customers wild for it.'

The three young men ate like lions, drank like Swiss, and waxed merry over the future success of the Cephalic Oil.

'This oil goes to your head,' said Finot, smiling, and Gaudissart exhausted whole series of puns on the words, oil, head, and hair.

In the midst of their Homeric laughter over the dessert, the knocker sounded, and in spite of the toasts and the wishes for luck exchanged among the three friends, they heard it.

'It is my uncle! He is capable of coming to see me,' cried Popinot.

'An uncle?' asked Finot, 'and we have not a glass!'

'My friend Popinot's uncle is an examining magistrate,' said Gaudissart, by way of reply to Finot; 'there is no occasion to hoax him, he saved my life. Ah! if you had found yourself in the fix I was in, with the scaffold staring you in the face, where, *kouik*, off goes your hair for good!' (and he imitated the fatal knife by

a gesture), 'you would be apt to remember the righteous judge to whom you owe the preservation of the channel that the champagne goes down! You would remember him if you were dead drunk. You don't know, Finot, but what you may want M. Popinot one day. *Saquerlotte!* You must make your bow to him, and thirteen to the dozen!'

It was, as a matter of fact, the 'righteous judge,' who was asking for his nephew of the woman who opened the door. Anselme recognised the voice, and went down, candle in hand, to light his way.

'Good evening, gentlemen,' said the magistrate.

The Illustrious Gaudissart made a profound bow. Finot looked the new-comer over with drunken eyes, and decided that Popinot's uncle was tolerably wooden-headed.

'There is no luxury here,' said the judge, gravely looking round the room; 'but, my boy, you must begin by being nothing if you are to be something great.'

'How profound he is!' said Gaudissart, turning to Finot.

'An idea for an article,' said the journalist.

'Oh! is that you, sir?' said the judge, recognising the commercial traveller. 'Eh! what are you doing here?'

'I want to do all my little part, sir, towards making your dear nephew's fortune. We have just been pondering over the prospectus for this oil of his, and this gentleman here is the author of the prospectus, which seems to us to be one of the finest things in the literature of periwigs.'

The judge looked at Finot.

'This gentleman is M. Andoche Finot,' Gaudissart said, 'one of the most distinguished young men in literature; he does political leaders and the minor theatres for the Government newspapers; he is a Minister who is by way of being an author.'

Here Finot tugged at Gaudissart's coat-tails.

'Very well, boys,' said the judge, to whom these words explained the appearance of the table covered with the remnants of a feast very excusable under the circumstances.

'As for you, Anselme,' he continued, turning to Popinot, 'get ready to pay a visit to M. Birotteau; I must go to see him this evening. You will sign your deed of partnership; I have gone through it very carefully. As you are going to manufacture your oil in the Faubourg du Temple, I think that he ought to make over the lease of the workshop to you, and that he has power to sublet; if things are all in order, it will save disputes afterwards. These walls look to me to be very damp, Anselme; bring up trusses of straw, and put them round about where your bed stands.'

'Excuse me, sir,' said Gaudissart with a courtier's suppleness, 'we have just put up the wall-paper ourselves to-day, and—it—is—not quite dry.'

'Economy! good!' said the judge.

'Listen,' said Gaudissart in Finot's ear; 'my friend Popinot is a good young man; he is going off with his uncle, so come along and let us finish the evening with our fair cousins.'

The journalist turned out the lining of his waistcoat pocket. Popinot saw the manœuvre, and slipped a twenty-franc piece into the hand of the author of his prospectus. The judge had a cab waiting at the corner of the street, and carried off his nephew to call on Birotteau.

Pillerault, M. and Mme. Ragon, and Roguin were playing at boston, and Césarine was embroidering a fichu, when the elder Popinot and Anselme appeared. Roguin, sitting opposite Mme. Ragon, could watch Césarine, who sat by her side, and saw the happy look on the girl's face when Anselme came in, saw her flush up red as a pomegranate flower, and called his head-clerk's attention to her by a significant gesture.

'So this is to be a day of deeds, is it?' said the perfumer, when greetings had been exchanged, and the judge explained the reason of the visit.

César, Anselme, and the judge went up to the perfumer's temporary quarters on the second floor to debate the matter of the lease and the deed of partnership drawn up by the elder Popinot. It was arranged that the lease should run for eighteen years, so as to be conterminous with the lease of the house in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants; trifling matter as it appeared at the time, it was destined later to serve Birotteau's interests.

When they returned to the sitting-room, the elder Popinot, surprised by the confusion and the men at work on a Sunday in the house of so devout a man, asked the reason of it all. This was the question for which César was waiting.

'Although you are not worldly, sir, you will not object to our celebrating our deliverance; and that is not all—if we are arranging for a little gathering of our friends, it is partly also to celebrate my promotion to the order of the Legion of Honour.'

'Ah!' said the examining magistrate (who had not been decorated).

'It may be that I have shown myself not unworthy of this signal mark of Royal favour by discharging my functions at the Tribunal . . . oh! I mean to say Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for the Royalist cause on the steps——'

'Yes,' said the magistrate.

'Steps of Saint-Roch, on the 13th of Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon.'

'I shall be glad to come,' said M. Popinot; 'and if my wife is well enough, I will bring her.'

'Xandrot,' said Roguin, on the door-step, 'give up all thoughts of marrying Césarine; in six weeks' time you will see that I have given you sound counsel.'

'Why?' asked Crottat.

'My dear fellow, Birotteau is about to spend a hundred thousand francs over this ball of his, and he is embarking his whole fortune, against my advice, in this building-land scheme. In six weeks' time these people will not have bread to eat. Marry Mlle. Lourdois, the house-painter's daughter; she has three hundred thousand francs to her fortune. I have planned this shift for you. If you will pay me down the money, you can have my practice to-morrow for a hundred thousand francs.'

The splendours of the perfumer's forthcoming ball, announced to Europe by the newspapers, were very differently announced in commercial circles by flying rumours of work-people employed night and day on the perfumer's house. The rumours took various forms; here it was said that César had taken the house on either side; there, that his drawing-rooms were to be gilded; some said that no tradespeople would be invited, and that the ball was given to Government officials only; and the perfumer was severely blamed for his ambition, they scoffed at his political aspirations, they denied that he had been wounded! More than one scheme was set on foot, in the second arrondissement, in consequence of the ball; the friends of the family took things quietly, but the claims of distant acquaintances were vast.

Those who have favour to bestow, never lack courtiers; and a goodly number of the guests were at no little pains to procure their cards of invitation. The Birotteaus were amazed to find so many friends whose existence they had not suspected. This eagerness on their part alarmed Mme. Birotteau; she looked more and more gloomy as the days went by and the solemn festival came nearer. She had confessed to César from the very first that she should not know how to act her part as hostess, and the innumerable small details frightened her. Where was the plate to come from?

How about the glass, the refreshments, the forks and spoons? And who would look after it all?—She begged Birotteau to stand near the door and see that no one came who had not been asked to the ball; she had heard strange things about people who came to dances claiming acquaintance with people whom they did not know by name.

One evening, ten days before the famous Sunday, Messieurs Braschon, Grindot, Lourdois, and Chaffaroux the contractor having given their word that the rooms should be ready for the 17th of December, there had been a laughable conference after dinner in the humble little sitting-room on the mezzanine floor—César and his wife and daughter were making a list of guests and writing the cards of invitation, which had been sent in only that morning, nicely printed in the English fashion on rose-coloured paper, in accordance with the precepts laid down in the *Complete Guide to Etiquette*.

'Look here!' said César; 'we must not leave anybody out.'

'If we forget any one,' remarked Constance, 'we shall be reminded of it. Mme. Derville, who never called upon us before, sailed in yesterday evening in great state.'

'She was very pretty; I liked her,' said Césarine.

'Yet before she was married she was even worse off than I,' said Constance; 'she used to do plain needlework in the Rue Montmartre; she has made shirts for your father.'

'Well, let us put the great people down at the top of the list,' said César. 'Write "M. le Duc and Mme. la Duchesse de Lenoncourt," Césarine.'

'Goodness! César,' cried Constance, 'pray don't begin to send invitations to people whom you only know through the business. Are you going to ask the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry? She is more nearly related to your late godmother, the Marquise d'Uxelles, than even the Duc de Lenoncourt. And shall you ask

the two MM. Vandenesse, M. de Marsay, M. de Ronquerolles, M. de l'Aiglemont; in short, all your customers? You are mad; honours are turning your head——'

'Yes! but M. le Comte de Fontaine and his family. Eh? He used to come to the *Queen of Roses* under the name of *Grand-Jacques* with the *Gars* (M. le Marquis de Montauran that was) and M. de la Billardière, whom they called the *Nantais* in the days before the great affair of the 13th of Vendémiaire. And they would shake hands with you then, and it was, "My dear Birotteau, keep your heart up, and give your life, like the rest of us, for the good cause!" We are old fellow-conspirators.'

'Put him down,' said Constance; 'if M. de la Billardière and his son are coming, they must have somebody to speak to.'

'Set down his name, Césarine,' said Birotteau.—'*Imprimis*, His Worship the Prefect of the Seine; he may or may not come, but he is the head of the municipal corporation, and "honour to whom honour is due."—M. de la Billardière, the mayor, and his son. (Write down the number of the people after every name.)—My colleague, M. Granet, and his wife. She is very ugly, but, all the same, we cannot leave her out.—M. Curel, the goldsmith, Colonel of the National Guard, and his wife and two daughters. Those are what I call the authorities. Now for the big-wigs!—M. le Comte and Mme. la Comtesse de Fontaine and their daughter, Mlle. Émilie de Fontaine.'

'An insolent girl, who makes me come out of the shop to speak to her at her carriage door in all weathers,' said Mme. César. 'If she comes at all, it will be to make fun of us.'

'In that case, perhaps she will come,' said César, who meant to fill his rooms at all costs. 'Go on, Césarine—M. le Comte and Mme. la Comtesse de Granville, my landlord, the hardest head in the Court of Appeal,

Derville says.—Oh! by the by, M. de la Billardière has arranged for me to be presented to-morrow by M. le Comte de Lacépède himself; it is only polite to ask the Grand Chancellor to dinner and to the ball.—M. Vauquelin. Put him down for the dinner and for the ball too, Césarine. And, while we remember it, all the Chiffrevilles and the Protez family.—M. Popinot, judge of the Tribunal of the Seine, and Mme. Popinot.—M. and Mme. Thirion, he is an usher of the Privy Chamber, and a friend of the Ragons; it is said that their daughter is to be married to one of M. Camusot's sons by his first marriage.'

'César, do not forget young Horace Bianchon; he is M. Popinot's nephew and Anselme's cousin,' put in Constance.

'Ah, to be sure! Césarine has put a figure four very plainly after the Popinots.—M. and Mme. Rabourdin; M. Rabourdin is at the head of one of the departments in M. de la Billardière's division.—M. Cochin of the same department, and his wife and son; they are sleeping-partners in Matifat's concern; and while we are about it, put down M. and Mme. and Mlle. Matifat.

'The Matifats have been making overtures for their friends, M. and Mme. Colleville, M. and Mme. Thuillier, and the Saillards.'

'We shall see,' said César. 'Our stockbroker, M. Jules Desmarets and his wife.'

'She will be the prettiest woman in the room!' cried Césarine. 'I like her, oh! more than any one!'

'Derville and his wife.'

'Just put down M. and Mme. Coquelin, who took over uncle Pillerault's business,' said Constance. 'They made so sure of being asked, that the poor little thing is having a grand ball-dress made by my dressmaker—a white satin overskirt covered with tulle, embroidered with blue chicory flowers. It would not have taken much to persuade her to have a gold embroidered court-

dress. If we left them out, we should make two bitter enemies.'

'Put them down, Césarine; we must show our respect for trade, for we are tradespeople ourselves.—M. and Mme. Roguin.'

'Mamma, Mme. Roguin will wear her *rivière*, all her diamonds, and her Mechlin lace gown.'

'M. and Mme. Lebas,' César continued.—'And next, the President of the Tribunal of Commerce and his wife and two daughters (I forgot to put them among the authorities).—M. and Mme. Lourdois and their daughter. —M. Claparon the banker; M. du Tillet, M. Grindot, M. Molineux; Pillerault and his landlord; M. and Mme. Camusot, the rich silk mercer, and all their family, the one at the École polytechnique and the advocate; he will receive an appointment as judge —he is the one that is engaged to be married to Mlle. Thirion.'

'It will only be a provincial appointment,' said Césarine.

'M. Cardot, Camusot's father-in-law, and all the young Cardots. Stay! there are the Guillaumes in the Rue du Colombier, Lebas's wife's people, two old folk who will be wall-flowers.—Alexandre Crottat,—Célestin——'

'Papa, do not forget M. Andoche Finot and M. Gaudissart, two young men who have been so useful to M. Anselme.'

'Gaudissart? He got himself into trouble. But, never mind, he is going away in a few days, and will travel for our oil,—so put him down! As for Master Andoche Finot, what is he to us?'

'M. Anselme says that he will be a great man; he is as clever as Voltaire.'

'An author is he? They are all of them atheists.'

'Put him down, papa; so far there are not so very many men who dance. Besides, your nice prospectus for the oil was his doing.'

'He believes in our oil, does he?' said César. 'Put him down, dear child.'

'So I too have my protégés on the list,' commented Césarine.

'Put M. Mitral, my process-server, and our doctor, M. Haudry; it is for form's sake, he will not come.'

'He will come for his game of cards,' said Césarine.

'Ah! by the by, César, I hope that you will ask M. l'Abbé Loraux to dinner!'

'I have written to him already,' said César.

'Oh! we must not forget Lebas's sister-in-law, Mme. Augustine de Sommervieux,' said Césarine. 'Poor little thing! she is very unwell; Lebas said that she was dying of grief.'

'See what comes of marrying an artist,' cried the perfumer.—'Just look at your mother; she has fallen asleep,' he said, in a low voice, to his daughter. 'Bye-bye—sleep softly, Madame César.—Well, now,' said César, turning to his daughter, 'how about your mother's dress?'

'Yes, papa, everything will be ready. Mamma thinks that she is to have a Canton crape gown like mine, and the dressmaker is sure that there is no need to try it on.'

'How many are there altogether?' César went on aloud, as his wife opened her eyes.

'A hundred and nine, with the assistants,' said Césarine.

'Where are we going to put all those people?' asked Mme. Birotteau. 'And when all is over, after the Sunday comes Monday,' she said naïvely.

Nothing can be done simply when people aspire to rise from one social rank to another. Neither Mme. Birotteau, nor César, nor any one else might venture on any pretext whatsoever on to the first floor. César had promised the errand-boy Raguet a new suit of clothes if he kept watch faithfully and carried out his orders properly. Like the Emperor Napoleon at Compiègne, when he

had the château restored for his marriage with Marie-Louise of Austria, Birotteau wanted to see nothing till the whole was finished ; he meant to enjoy 'the surprise.' So all unconsciously the old enemies met, this time not on the field of battle, but on the common ground of bourgeois vanity. M. Grindot was to take César over the new rooms like a cicerone exhibiting a gallery to a tourist.

Every one in the house, moreover, had his or her own 'surprise.' Césarine, the dear child, had spent a hundred louis, all her little hoard, on books for her father. M. Grindot had confided to her one morning that there were two fitted bookcases in her father's room, which was to be a study ; this was the architect's surprise ; and Césarine spent all her savings with a bookseller. She had bought the works of Bossuet, Racine, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Molière, Buffon, Fénelon, Delille, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, La Fontaine, Corneille, Pascal, and La Harpe ; in short, the ordinary collection of classics to be seen everywhere, books which her father would never read. A terrible bookbinder's bill must of necessity be the result. Thouvenin, that great and unpunctual artist and binder, had undertaken to send the books home on the 18th at mid-day. Césarine had told her uncle in confidence of her difficulty, and he had undertaken the bill. César's surprise for his wife took the shape of a cherry-coloured velvet gown trimmed with lace ; it was of this dress that he had just spoken to the daughter, who had been his accomplice. Mme. Birotteau's surprise for the new Chevalier of Honour consisted of a pair of gold buckles and a solitaire-pin. Finally, there was the surprise of the new rooms for the whole family, to be followed in a fortnight by the great surprise of the bills to be paid.

After mature reflection, César decided that some of the invitations must be given in person, and some might be delivered by Raguet in the evening. He took a cab

and handed his wife into it (his wife, whose beauty suffered a temporary eclipse from a hat and feathers and the last new shawl, the cashmere shawl for which she had longed for fifteen years), and away went the perfumers dressed in their best to acquit themselves of twenty-two calls in a morning.

César spared his wife the difficulties attendant on straining the resources of a bourgeois household to prepare the various confections which the splendour of the occasion demanded. A treaty was arranged between Birotteau and the great Chevet. Chevet would furnish the dinner and the wines; he would provide a splendid service of plate (which brings in as much as an estate to its owner), and a retinue of servants under the command of a sufficiently imposing *maître d'hotel*, all of them responsible for their sayings and doings. Chevet was to take up his quarters in the kitchen and dining-room on the mezzanine floor, and not to quit possession until he had served up a dinner for twenty persons at six o'clock, and a grand collation an hour after midnight. The ices, to be served in pretty cups with silver-gilt spoons on silver trays, would be supplied by Foy's Café, and the refreshments by Tanrade — an added lustre to the feast.

'Be easy,' César said to his wife, who looked somewhat over-anxious on the day before the great day, 'Chevet, Tanrade, and the people from Foy's Café will occupy the mezzanine floor, Virginie will be on guard above, and the shop shall be shut up. There is nothing left for us to do but to strut about on the first floor.'

On the 16th, at two o'clock, M. de la Billardière came for César. They were to go together to the Chancellerie de la Légion d'honneur, where Birotteau, with some ten others, was to be received as a Chevalier by M. le Comte de Lacépède. The perfumer had tears in his eyes when the mayor came for him; the surprise which Constance

had planned had just taken place, and César had been presented with the gold buckles and solitaire.

'It is very sweet to be so loved,' said he, as he stepped into the cab; Constance and Césarine standing on the threshold, and the assistants gathered in a group to see him go. All of them gazed at César in his silk stockings and black-silk breeches, and the new coat of cornflower blue on which the ribbon was about to blaze—the red ribbon which, according to Molineux, had been steeped in blood.

When César came back at dinner-time, he was pale with joy. He looked at his Cross in every looking-glass, for in his first intoxication he could not be content to wear the ribbon only; there was no tinge of false modesty about his elation.

'The Grand Chancellor is charming, dear,' said he; 'at a word from M. de la Billardière, he accepted my invitation; he is coming with M. Vauquelin. M. de Lacépède is a great man, yes, as great as M. Vauquelin. He has written forty volumes. And then he is a peer of France as well as an author. We must not forget to say "Your Lordship," or "M. le Comte," when we address him.'

'Do eat your dinner,' remarked his wife.—'Your father is worse than a child,' Constance added, looking at Césarine.

'How nice that looks at your button-hole!' said Césarine. 'They will present arms when you pass; we will go out together!'

'All the sentries will present arms to me.'

Grindot and Braschon came downstairs as he spoke. 'After dinner, sir, you and madame and mademoiselle may like to look over the rooms; Braschon's foreman is just putting up a few curtain brackets, and three men are lighting the candles.'

'You will need a hundred and twenty candles,' said Braschon.

'A bill for two hundred francs from Trudon,' began Mme. César, but a look from the Chevalier checked her lamentations.

'Your fête will be magnificent, M. le Chevalier,' put in Braschon.

'Flatterers already!' César thought within himself. 'The Abbé Loraux enjoined it upon me not to fall into their snares, and to remain humble; I will keep my origin in mind.'

But César did not understand the drift of the remark let fall by the rich upholsterer of the Rue Saint-Antoine. Braschon had made a dozen futile efforts to secure invitations for himself and his wife, his daughter, aunt, and mother-in-law. And so César made an enemy. On the threshold, Braschon did not call him again 'M. le Chevalier.'

Then came the private view. César and his wife and Césarine went out through the shop and came in from the street. The door had been reconstructed in a grand style, the two leaves were divided up into square panels, and in the centre of each panel was a cast-iron ornament, duly painted. This kind of door, which is now so common in Paris, was at that time the very newest thing. Beneath the double staircase in the vestibule, opposite the door, in the plinth which had so disturbed César's mind, a sort of box had been contrived where an old woman could be ensconced. The vestibule, with its black-and-white marble floor, and its walls painted to look like marble, was lighted by a lamp of antique pattern, with four sockets for the wicks. The architect had combined a rich effect with apparent simplicity. A narrow crimson carpet relieved the whiteness of the stone. The first landing gave access to the mezzanine floor. The door on the staircase, which gave access to the first-floor rooms, was in the same style as the street door, but this was a piece of cabinet work.

'How charming!' said Césarine. 'And yet there is nothing which catches the eye.'

'Exactly, mademoiselle, the effect is produced by the exact proportions of the stylobates, the plinths, the cornice, and the ornaments; and then I have not employed gilding anywhere; the colours are subdued, and there are no glaring tones.'

'It is a science,' said Césarine.

Then they entered the ante-room; it was simple, spacious, and tastefully decorated; a parquet floor had been laid down. The drawing-room was lighted by three windows, which looked upon the street; here the colours were white and red; the outlines of the cornices were delicate, so was the paint; there was nothing to dazzle the eyes. The ornaments on the mantel-shelf, of white marble supported on white marble columns, had been carefully chosen; there was nothing tawdry about them, and they were in keeping with the details of the furniture. In fact, throughout the room a subtle harmony prevailed, such as none but an artist can establish, by subordinating everything, down to the least accessories, to the general scheme of decoration; a harmony which strikes the philistine, though he cannot account for it. The light of twenty-four wax-candles in the chandelier displayed the glories of the crimson silk curtains; the parquet floor tempted Cesarine to dance. Through a green-and-white boudoir they reached Cesar's study.

'I have put a bed here,' said Grindot, throwing open the doors of an alcove, cleverly concealed between the two bookcases. Either you or Mme. Birotteau may fall ill, and an invalid requires a separate room.'

'But the bookcase is full of bound books! . . . Oh! wife, wife!' cried César.

'No, this is Césarine's surprise.'

'Pardon a father's emotion,' exclaimed Birotteau, embracing his daughter.

'Of course, of course, sir,' said Grindot. 'You are in your own house.'

The prevailing tone of the study was brown, relieved by green; for by skilful modulations all the rooms were brought into harmony with each other. Thus the prevailing colour of one room was more sparingly introduced as a subsidiary in another, and *vice versâ*. The print of *Hero and Leander* shone conspicuous from a panel in César's new sanctum.

'And *you* are to pay for all this?' César said merrily.

'That beautiful engraving is M. Anselme's gift to you,' said Césarine.

(Anselme, like the others, had managed to afford his surprise.)

'Poor boy! he has done as I did for M. Vauquelin.'

Mme. Birotteau's room came next in order. Here the architect had lavished splendours to please the good folk whom he wished to use to his own ends. He had promised to make a study of this redecoration, and he had kept his word. The room was hung with blue silk, but the cords and tassels were white; while the furniture, covered with white cashmere, was relieved with blue. The clock on the white marble chimney-piece took the form of a marble slab, on which Venus reclined. The pretty Wilton carpet, of Eastern design, was the keynote of Césarine's apartment, a dainty little bedroom hung with chintz; there stood her piano, a pretty wardrobe with a mirror in it, a small white bed with plain curtains, and all the little possessions that girls love.

The dining-room lay behind César's study and the blue-and-white bedroom, and was entered by a door on the staircase. Here the decorations were in the style known as Louis XIV. The sideboards were inlaid with brass and tortoise-shell; there was a Boule clock, and the walls were hung with stuffs and adorned with gilt studs.

No words can describe the joy of these three human beings, which reached its height when Mme. Birotteau,

returning to her room, found her new dress lying there on the bed; the cherry-coloured velvet gown, trimmed with lace, which her husband had given her. Virginie had stolen in on tiptoe to lay it there.

'The rooms do you great credit, sir,' Constance said, addressing Grindot. 'More than a hundred people will be here to-morrow evening, and you will be complimented by everybody.'

'I shall recommend you,' said César. 'You will meet all the first-rate people, and you will be better known in a single evening than if you had built a hundred houses.'

Constance, touched by what had happened, no longer thought of the expense or of criticising her husband, and for the following reasons. That morning, when Popinot had brought the *Hero and Leander*, he had assured her that the Cephalic Oil would be a success; Constance had always had a high opinion of Popinot's abilities and intelligence, and Popinot was working with unheard-of enthusiasm. The money lavished by Birotteau on these extravagancies might amount to a good round sum; but the young lover had promised that, in six months' time, Birotteau's share of the profits on the sales of the oil would cover them. After nineteen years of apprehension, it was so sweet to put doubts aside for a single day; and Constance promised her daughter that she would not spoil her husband's joy by any afterthought, but would give herself up entirely to gladness. So when M. Grindot left them about eleven o'clock, she flung her arms about her husband's neck and shed a few tears of joy.

'Ah, César,' she said, 'you make me very silly and very happy.'

'If it will only last, you mean, do you not?' César asked, smiling.

'It will last; I have no fear now,' said Mme. César.

'That is right; you appreciate me at last.'

Those who have sufficient greatness of character to

know their weaknesses will confess that a poor orphan girl who, eighteen years ago, had been earning her living behind the counter of the *Little Sailor* in the Ile Saint-Louis, and a poor peasant lad who had come on foot from Touraine, stick in hand and with hobnailed shoes on his feet, might well feel gratified and happy to give such a fête on an occasion so much to their credit.

'*Mon Dieu*, I would willingly give a hundred francs for a visitor,' cried César.

'M. l'Abbé Loraux,' announced Virginie, and the Abbé appeared. The priest was at this time curate of Saint-Sulpice. Never has the power of the soul been more plainly revealed than in this reverend ecclesiastic, who left a profound impression on the minds of all those with whom he came in contact. The exercise of Catholic virtues had given sublimity to a harsh face, almost repellent in its ugliness; it was as if something of the light of heaven shone from it before the time. The influences of a simple and sincere life, passing into the blood, had modified those rugged features, the fires of charity had chastened their uncouth outlines. In Claparon's case, the nature of the man had stamped itself on his face and degraded and brutalised it, but here the grace of the three fair human virtues, Hope, Faith, and Charity, hovered about the wrinkled lines. There was a penetrating power in his words, slowly and gently spoken. He dressed like other priests in Paris, and allowed himself a chestnut-brown overcoat. No trace of ambition had sullied the pure heart, which the angels would surely bear to God in its primitive innocence; it had required all the kindly urgency of the daughter of Louis XVI. to induce the Abbé Loraux to accept a benefice in Paris, and then he had taken one of the poorest.

Just now he looked somewhat disquieted as he surveyed all these splendours; he smiled at the three before him, and shook his head.

'Children,' he said, 'it is my part to comfort those that mourn, and not to be present at festivals. I have come to thank M. César and to congratulate you. There is only one festival that will bring me here—the marriage of this pretty maid.'

A quarter of an hour later the Abbé took his leave, and neither César nor his wife had dared to show him the new arrangements. The sober apparition threw a few drops of cold water on César's joyous ebullitions.

They slept that night amid the new glories, each taking possession of the little luxuries and pretty furniture for which they had longed. Césarine helped her mother to undress before the mirror of the white marble toilet table; César was fain to use his newly-acquired superfluities at once; and the heads of all the three were filled with visions of the joys of the morrow.

The next day, at four o'clock, they had been to mass, and had read vespers; the mezzanine floor had been delivered over to the secular arm, in the shape of Chevet's people, and Césarine and her mother betook themselves to their toilets. Never was costume more becoming to Mme. César than the cherry-coloured velvet gown with the lace about it, the short sleeves adorned with lappets; the rich stuff and the glowing colour set off the youthful freshness of her shapely arms, the dazzling whiteness of her skin, the gracious outlines of her neck and shoulders. The naïve happiness felt by every woman when she is conscious that she looks at her best lent a vague sweetness to Mme. Birotteau's Grecian profile; and the outlines of her face, finely cut as a cameo, appeared in all their delicate beauty. Césarine, in her white crape dress, with a wreath of white roses in her hair, and a rose at her waist, her shoulders and the outlines of her bodice modestly covered by a scarf, turned Popinot's head.

'These people are eclipsing us,' said Mme. Roguin to her husband, as she went through the rooms.

The notary's wife was furious. A woman can always measure the superiority or inferiority of a rival, and Mme. Roguin felt that she was not as beautiful as Mme. César.

'Pooh, not for long. In a little while the poor thing will be ruined, and your carriage will splash the mud on her as she goes afoot through the streets.'

Vauquelin's manner was perfect. He came with M. de Lacépède, who had brought his colleague in his carriage. To Mme. César, in her radiant beauty, the two learned Academicians paid compliments in scientific language.

'You possess the secret, unknown to chemistry, of retaining youth and beauty, madame.'

'You are in your own house, so to speak, M. l'Académicien,' said Birotteau.—'Yes, M. le Comte,' he went on, turning to the Grand Chancellor of the Legion of Honour, 'I owe my success to M. Vauquelin. I have the honour of presenting to your lordship M. le President (of the Tribunal of Commerce).—That is M. le Comte de Lacépède, a peer of France, and one of the greatest men in France besides; he has written forty volumes,' he added, for the benefit of Joseph Lebas, who came with the President.

The guests were punctual. The ordinary tradesman's dinner party followed, abundant in good humour and merriment, and enlivened by the homely jokes that never fail to provoke laughter. Ample justice was done to the excellent dishes, and the wines were thoroughly appreciated. It was half-past nine before they went into the drawing-room for coffee, and cabs had already begun to arrive with impatient dancers. An hour later, the rooms were full, and the dance had become a crush. M. de Lacépède and M. Vauquelin went, in spite of entreaties from César, who followed them despairingly to the staircase. He had better fortune with the elder Popinot and M. de la Billardière, who remained.

With the exception of three women, Mlle. Fontaine, Mme. Jules, and Mme. Rabourdin, who severally represented aristocracy, finance, and official dignities, and by their brilliant beauty, dress, and manner presented a striking contrast to the rest of the assembly, the toilettes of the remainder were of the heavy and substantial order, too suggestive of a well-lined purse, which gives to a crowd of citizens' wives and daughters a certain air of vulgarity, made cruelly prominent in the present case by the daintiness and grace of the three ladies.

The bourgeoisie of the Rue Saint-Denis displayed itself majestically in the full glory of its absurdities carried to the burlesque point. It was that same bourgeoisie, nor more nor less, which tricks its offspring out in the uniform of the Lancers or of the National Guard, that buys *Victories and Conquests*, *The Old Soldier at the Plough*, and admires *The Pauper's Funeral*, which rejoices to go on Guard, goes on Sundays to the inevitable country house, is at pains to acquire a distinguished air, and dreams of municipal honours; the bourgeoisie that looks on every one with jealous eyes, and yet is kindly, helpful, devoted, warm-hearted, and compassionate, ready to subscribe for the orphan children of a General Foy, for the Greeks (all unwitting of their piracies), for the Champ d'Asile when it no longer exists; a bourgeoisie that falls a victim to its own good qualities, and is flouted by a social superiority which marks a real inferiority, for an ignorance of social conventions fosters that native kindliness of heart; a bourgeoisie which brings up frank-hearted daughters inured to work, full of good qualities, which are lost at once if they mingle with the classes above them; a common-sense, matter-of-fact womankind, from among whom the worthy Chrysale should have taken a wife; that bourgeoisie, in short, so admirably represented by the Matifats, the druggists in the Rue des Lombards, who had supplied the *Queen of Roses* for sixty years.

Mme. Matifat, anxious to appear stately, wore a

turban on her head, and was dancing in a heavy poppy-red gown embroidered with gold, a toilette that harmonised with a haughty countenance, a Roman nose, and the splendours of a crimson complexion. Even M. Matifat, so glorious when the National Guard was reviewed, when you might see the chain and bunch of seals blazing on his portly person fifty paces away, was obscured by this Catherine II. of the counting-house; yet her short, stout, spectacled consort, with his shirt collar almost up to his ears, distinguished himself by his deep bass voice and by the richness of his vocabulary.

He never said 'Corneille,' but 'the sublime Corneille.' Racine was the 'tender Racine'; Voltaire, oh! Voltaire, 'takes the second place in every class, more of a wit than a genius, but nevertheless a man of genius!' Rousseau, 'a gloomy, suspicious nature, a man overbrimming with pride, who ended by hanging himself.' He related tedious stock anecdotes about Piron, who is looked upon as a prodigious personage among the bourgeoisie. There was a slight tendency to obscenity in Matifat's conversation; he was an infatuated admirer of theatrical divinities; and it was even said of him that, in imitation of old Cardot and the wealthy Camusot, he kept a mistress. Now and then Mme. Matifat would hastily interrupt him on the brink of an anecdote by crying, at the top of her voice, 'Mind what you are going to tell us, old man!' In familiar conversation she always addressed him as 'old man.' The voluminous lady of the Rue des Lombards caused Mlle. de Fontaine's aristocratic countenance to lose its repose; the haughty damsel could not help smiling when she overheard Mme. Matifat say to her husband, 'Don't make a rush for the ices, old man; it is bad style!'

It is harder to explain the differences which distinguish the great world from the bourgeoisie than it is for the bourgeoisie to efface them. The women, conscious of their toilettes, felt that this was a holiday; they made

no attempt to conceal an enjoyment which plainly showed that this ball was a great event in their busy lives; while the three women, each of whom represented a different higher social sphere, were at that moment as they would be on the morrow. They did not seem to be dressed for the occasion, had no desire to behold themselves amid the unaccustomed marvels of their costume, and showed no uneasiness as to its effect, which they had ascertained once and for all as they put the last touches to their ball dresses before the mirror; there was no excitement in their faces; they danced with the grace and ease of movement which the forgotten sculptors of a bygone age caught and recorded in their statues. But the others bore the impress of daily toil, toil showed itself in their attitude, in their exaggerated enjoyment; their glances were naïvely curious, their voices were not subdued to the key of the low murmur which gives such an inimitable piquancy to ballroom conversations; and, above all things, they lacked the impertinent gravity which contains the germ of epigram, the repose of manner which marks those whose self-command is perfect. So Mme. Rabourdin, Mme. Jules, and Mlle. de Fontaine, who had expected infinite amusement from this perfumer's ball, stood out against the background of citizens' wives and daughters, conspicuous by their languid grace, by the exquisite taste displayed in their toilettes, and by their manner of dancing, even as three principal performers at the Opera are set off by the rank and file of supernumeraries on the stage. Jealous and astonished eyes watched them. Mme. Roguin, Constance, and Césarine formed a link, as it were, between these three aristocratic types and the tradesmen's womankind.

At every ball a moment comes when excitement, or the torrents of light, the gaiety, the music, and the movement of the dance carries away the dancers, and all the shades of difference are drowned in the *crescendo* of the *tutti*. In a little while the ball would become a

Popinot——dared to speak of his love
Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher

romp. Mlle. de Fontaine determined to go; but as she sought the venerable Vendean leader's arm, Birotteau and his wife and daughter hastened to prevent the defection of the aristocracy of their assembly.

'There is a perfume of good taste about the rooms which really surprises me; I congratulate you upon it,' said the insolent girl, addressing the perfumer.

Birotteau was too much intoxicated by the compliments publicly addressed to him to understand this speech; but his wife flushed up, and did not know what to answer.

'This is a national festival which does you honour,' Camusot said.

'I have seldom seen so fine a ball,' said M. de la Billardière, an official fib that cost him nothing.

Birotteau took all the congratulations seriously.

'What a charming sight, and how good the band is! Shall you often give us balls?' asked Mme. Lebas.

'What beautiful rooms! Did you plan them yourself?' inquired Mme. Desmarets, and César ventured on a lie, and allowed it to be thought that he was the originator of the scheme of decoration. Césarine, whose list of partners for the quadrilles was of course filled up, learned how much delicacy there was in Anselme's nature.

'If I only listened to my own wishes,' he had said in her ear, as they rose from dinner, 'I would entreat the favour of a quadrille with you, but my happiness would cost our self-love too dear.'

Césarine, who thought all men who walked straight ungraceful in their gait, determined to open the ball with Popinot. Popinot, encouraged by his aunt, who had bade him be bold, dared to speak of his love during the quadrille to the charming girl at his side, but in the roundabout ways that timid lovers take.

'My fortune depends on you, mademoiselle.'

'And how?'

'There is but one hope which can give me the power to make it.'

'Then hope.'

'Do you really know all that you have said in those two words?' asked Popinot.

'Hope for fortune,' said Césarine, with a mischievous smile.

As soon as the quadrille was over, Anselme rushed to his friend. 'Gaudissart! Gaudissart! succeed, or I shall blow my brains out.' He squeezed his friend's arm in a Herculean grasp. 'Success means that I shall marry Césarine. She has told me so; and see how beautiful she is!'

'Yes, she is prettily rigged out,' said Gaudissart; 'and she is rich. We will do her in oil.'

The good understanding between Mlle. Lourdois and Alexandre Crottat (Roguin's successor-designate) did not escape Mme. Birotteau, who could not give up without a pang the prospect of seeing her daughter the wife of a Paris notary. Uncle Pillerault, after exchanging a greeting with little Molineux, took up his quarters in an easy-chair near the bookcase. Hence he watched the card-players, listened to the talk about him, and went from time to time to the door to look at the moving flower-garden as the dancers' heads swayed in the figures of the quadrille. He turned a truly philosophical countenance on it all. The men were unspeakable, with the exception of du Tillet, who had already learned something of the manners of the fashionable world; of young Billardière, an incipient dandy; M. Jules Desmarets, and the official personages. But among the faces, all more or less comical, which gave the assembly its character, there was one in particular, worn into meaningless smoothness like the head on a five-franc piece issued by the Republic, but curious by reason of its association with a suit of clothes. This person, it will have been guessed, was none other than the petty

tyrant of the Cour Batave, arrayed in fine linen, yellowed with lying by in the press, displaying a shirt frill of venerable lace, secured by a pin with a bluish cameo. Short breeches of black silk treacherously revealed the spindle shanks on which he dared to repose his weight. César triumphantly took him round the four apartments devised by the architect on the first floor of his house.

'Hey! hey! it is your own affair, sir,' said Molineux. 'My first floor done up in this way will be worth another thousand crowns.'

Birotteau turned this off with a joke, but the little old man's words and tone had been like the prick of a needle. 'I shall soon have my first floor again; this man is ruining himself!'—that was the underlying sense of that '*will be worth*,' which had been a sudden revelation of Molineux's claws.

The pale, meagre face and cruel eyes struck du Tillet, whose attention had been called to the landlord in the first instance by the watch-chain from which a pound weight of trinkets hung and jingled, the green coat with white threads in it, and the odd-looking, turned-up collar, which gave the old man somewhat the appearance of a rattlesnake. So the banker went over to the little money-lender to learn how he came to be at a merry-making.

'Here, sir,' said Molineux, putting a foot into the boudoir, 'I am on M. le Comte de Granville's property, but here' (he pointed to the other foot) 'I am on my own, for this house belongs to me.'

And Molineux, more than willing to gratify the only one who had a mind to listen to him, was so charmed with du Tillet's attentive attitude, that he described himself, and gave an account of his habits, together with a complete history of the sauciness of Master Gendrin, and an exact relation of his transactions with the perfumer, without which transaction the ball would not have taken place.

'Ah! so M. César has paid his rent beforehand,' said du Tillet; 'nothing is more contrary to his habits.'

'Oh! I asked him to do so; I am so accommodating with my tenants!'

'If old Birotteau goes bankrupt,' thought du Tillet, 'that little rogue will certainly make a capital assignee. Such captiousness is not often met with; he must amuse himself at home, like Domitian, by killing flies when he is alone.'

Du Tillet betook himself to the card-tables, where Claparon (by his orders) had already taken his post. Du Tillet thought that, screened by a lamp shade, at *bouillotte*, his dummy-banker would escape all scrutiny. As they sat opposite one another, they looked such perfect strangers that the most suspicious observer could have discovered no sign of an understanding between them. Gaudissart, who knew that Claparon had risen in the world, did not dare to approach him; the wealthy ex-commercial traveller had given him the portentously cool stare of an upstart who does not care to be claimed by an old acquaintance.

Towards five o'clock in the morning the ball came to an end, like a spent rocket. By that time there only remained some forty cabs out of a hundred or more which had filled the Rue Saint-Honoré; and in the ball-room they were dancing the *boulangère*, which later was succeeded by the cotillon and the English gallop. Du Tillet, Roguin, young Cardot, Jules Desmarets, and the Comte de Granville were playing *bouillotte*. Du Tillet had won three thousand francs. The light of the wax-candles was growing pale in the dawn when the card-players rose to join in the last quadrille.

In bourgeois houses this supreme enjoyment never comes to an end without some enormities. Those who imposed awe or restraint on the others are gone; the intoxication of movement, the hot rooms, the spirits that lurk in the most harmless beverages, relax the stiffness

of the dowagers, who allow themselves to be drawn into the quadrilles, and yield to the excitement of the moment; men are heated, the lank hair comes down over their faces, and their grotesque appearance provokes laughter; the younger women grow frivolous, flowers have fallen here and there from their hair. Then is it that the bourgeois Momus enters, followed by his antic crew! Laughter breaks out in peals, and every one gives himself up to the merriment, thinking that with morning labour will resume its sway over him. Matifat was dancing with a woman's hat on his head; Célestin was indulging in burlesque movements. A few of the ladies clapped their hands noisily when they changed the figures of the interminable quadrille.

'How they are enjoying themselves!' said the happy Birotteau.

'If only they break nothing,' said Constance, who stood by Uncle Pillerault.

'You have given the most magnificent ball that I have seen, and I have seen many,' said du Tillet, with a bow to his late employer.

There is in one of Beethoven's eight symphonies a fantasia like a great poem; it is the culminating point of the *finale* of the Symphony in C minor. When, after the slow preparation of the mighty magician, so well understood by Habeneck, the rich curtain rises on this scene; when the bow of the enthusiastic leader of the orchestra calls forth the dazzling *motif*, through which the whole gathered force of the music flows, the poet, as his heart beats fast, will understand that this ball was in Birotteau's life like this moment when his own imagination feels the quickening power of the music, of this *motif*, which in itself perhaps raises the Symphony in C minor above its glorious sisters. For a radiant fairy springs up and waves her wand, and you hear the rustling of the

purple silken curtains raised by angels; the golden doors, carved like the bronze gates of the Baptistery in Florence, turn upon their hinges of adamant, and your eyes wander over far-off glories and vistas of fairy palaces. Forms not of this earth glide among them, the incense of prosperity rises, the fire is kindled on the altar of fortune, the scented air circles about it. Beings clad in white blue-bordered tunics smile divinely as they float before your eyes, shapes delicate and ethereal beyond expression turn faces of unearthly beauty upon you. The Loves hover in the air, filling it with the flames of their torches. You feel that you are loved; you are glad with a joy that you drink in without comprehending it as you bathe in the floods of a torrent of harmony which pours out for each the nectar of his choice; for as the music slides into your inmost soul, its desires are realised for a moment. Then when you have walked for a while in heaven, the enchanter plunges you back, by some deep and mysterious transition of the bass, into the morass of chill reality, only to draw you thence when he has awakened in you a thirst for his divine melodies, and your soul cries out to hear those sounds again. The history of the soul at the most glorious point in that beautiful *finale* is the history of the sensations which this festival brought in abundance for Constance and César. But it was no Beethoven, but a Collinet, who had composed upon his flute the *finale* of their commercial symphony.

The three Birotteaus, tired but happy, slept that morning with the sounds of the festival ringing in their ears. The building, repairs, furniture, banquets, toilettes, and Césarine's library (for the money had been repaid to her) had altogether raised the expense of that entertainment, without César's having a suspicion of it, to sixty thousand francs. So much did that luckless red ribbon, fastened by the King to a perfumer's buttonhole, cost the wearer. If any misfortune should befall

César Birotteau, this extravagance of his was like to bring him into serious trouble at the police court; a merchant lays himself open to a term of two years' imprisonment if, on examination, his expenses are considered excessive. It is, perhaps, more unpleasant to go to the Sixth Chamber for simple bad management or for a foolish trifle, than to come before a Court of Assize for a gigantic fraud; and in some people's eyes it is better to be a knave than a fool.

II

CÉSAR STRUGGLES WITH MISFORTUNE.

A WEEK after the ball, that final flare of the straw-fire of a prosperity which had lasted for eighteen years, and now was about to die out in darkness, César stood watching the passers-by through his shop window. He was thinking of the wide extent of his business affairs, and found them almost more than he could manage. Hitherto his life had been quite simple; he manufactured and sold his goods, or he bought to sell again. But now there was the speculation in building land, and his own share in the enterprise of A. Popinot & Company, besides a hundred and sixty thousand francs worth of bills to meet. Before long he would be compelled to discount some of his customers' bills (and his wife would not like it), or there must be an unheard-of success on Popinot's part; altogether, the poor man had so many things to think of that he felt as if he had more skeins to wind than he could hold.

How would Anselme steer his course? Birotteau treated Popinot much as a professor of rhetoric treats a student; he felt little confidence in his capacity, and was sorry that he could not be always on hand to look after him. The admonitory kick bestowed on Anselme's

shins by way of a recommendation to hold his tongue in Vauquelin's presence will illustrate the fears which the perfumer felt as to the newly-started business. Birotteau was very careful to hide his thoughts from his wife and daughter, and from his assistant; but within himself he felt as a Seine boatman might feel if by some freak of fortune a Minister should give him the command of a frigate. Such thoughts as these, rising like a fog in his brain, were but little favourable to clear thinking; he stood, therefore, trying to see things distinctly in his own mind.

Just at that moment a figure, for which he felt an intense aversion, appeared in the street; he beheld his second landlord, little Molineux. Everybody knows those dreams in which events are so crowded together that we pass through a whole lifetime, dreams in which a fantastical being reappears from time to time, always as the bearer of bad tidings—the villain of the piece. It seemed to Birotteau that fate had sent Molineux to play a similar part in his waking life. That countenance had grinned diabolically at him when the feast was at its height, and had turned an evil eye on the splendour; and now when César saw it again, he remembered the impression which the 'little curmudgeon' (to use his own expression) had given him but so much the more vividly, because Molineux had given him a fresh feeling of repulsion by suddenly breaking in upon his musings.

'Sir,' said the little man in his vampire's voice, 'we did this business in such an offhand fashion, that you forgot to approve the additions to this little private covenant of ours.'

As Birotteau took up the lease to repair the omission, the architect came in, bowed to the perfumer, and hovered about him with a diplomatic air.

'You know, sir, the difficulties at the outset when you are starting in business,' he said at last in Birotteau's

ear; 'you are satisfied with me; you would oblige me very much by paying my honorarium at once.'

Birotteau, who had paid away all his ready money and emptied his portfolio, told Célestin to draw a bill for two thousand francs at three months and a form of receipt.

'It is a very lucky thing for me that you undertook to pay the quarter which your next-door neighbour owed,' said Molineux, with malicious cunning in his smile. 'My porter has been round to tell me that the authorities have been affixing seals to his property, because Master Cayron has disappeared from the scene.'

'If only they don't come down on me for the five thousand francs!' thought Birotteau.

'People thought that he was doing very well,' said Lourdois, who had just come in to hand his statement to the perfumer.

'No one in business is quite safe from reverses until he retires,' remarked little Molineux, folding up his document with punctilious neatness.

The architect watched the little old creature with the pleasure that every artist feels at the sight of a living caricature which confirms his prejudices against the bourgeoisie.

'When you hold an umbrella over your head, you generally suppose that it is sheltered if it rains,' he observed.

Molineux looked harder at the architect's moustache and 'royale' than at his face, and the contempt that he felt for Grindot quite equalled Grindot's contempt for him. He stayed on to give the architect a parting scratch. By dint of living with his cats, there had come to be something feline in Molineux's ways as well as in his eyes.

Just at that moment, Ragon and Pillerault came in together.

'We have been talking over this business with the

judge,' Ragon said in César's ear. 'He says that in a speculation of this kind we must actually complete the purchase and have a receipt from the vendors if we are really to be severally propriet——'

'Oh! are you in the affair of the Madeleine?' asked Lourdois. 'People are talking about it; there will be houses to build!'

The house-painter had come to ask for a prompt settlement, but he found it to his interest not to press the perfumer.

'I have sent in my statement because it is the end of the year,' he said in a low voice for César's benefit; 'I do not want anything.'

'Well, what is it, César?' asked Pillerault, noticing his nephew's surprise; for César, overcome by the sight of the statement, made no answer to either Ragon or Lourdois.

'Oh! a trifle; I took five thousand francs of bills from a neighbour, the umbrella dealer, who is bankrupt. If he has given me bad paper, I shall be caught like a simpleton.'

'Why, I told you so long ago,' cried Ragon; 'a drowning man will catch hold of his father's leg to save himself, and drag him down with him. I have seen so much of bankruptcies! A man is not exactly a rogue to begin with; but when he gets into trouble, he is forced to become one.'

'True,' said Pillerault.

'Ah! if I ever get as far as the Chamber of Deputies, or have some influence with Government . . .' said Birotteau, rising on tiptoe, and sinking back again on his heels.

'What will you do?' asked Lourdois. 'You are a wise man.'

Molineux, always interested by a discussion on law, stayed in the shop to listen; and as the attention paid by others is infectious, Pillerault and Ragon, who knew

César's opinions, listened none the less with as much gravity as the three strangers.

'I should have a Tribunal and a permanent bench of judges,' said César, 'and a public prosecutor for criminal cases. After an examination, made by a judge who should discharge the functions of agents by procuration trustees and registrar, the trader should be declared *temporarily insolvent* or a *fraudulent bankrupt*. In the first case, he should be bound over to pay his creditors in full; to that end, he should be trustee for his own and his wife's property (for everything he had, or might inherit, would belong to his creditors); he should manage his estate for their benefit and under their inspection; in fact, he should carry on the business for them, signing his name, in every case, as "such a one, in liquidation," until everybody was paid in full. But if he were made a bankrupt, he should be condemned to stand in the pillory in the Exchange for a couple of hours, as they used to do, with a green cap on his head. His own property and his wife's, and his interest in any other estate, should be forfeit to his creditors, and he should be banished the kingdom.'

'Business would be a little safer,' said Lourdois; 'people would think twice before going into a speculation.'

'The law as it stands is never carried out,' cried César, lashing himself up; 'more than fifty merchants out of a hundred could only pay seventy-five per cent., or they sell goods at twenty-five per cent. below invoice price, and spoil trade in that way.'

'M. Birotteau is in the right,' said Molineux; 'the law allows far too much latitude. The entire estate should be made over to the creditors, or the man should be disgraced.'

'Bother take it,' said César, 'at the rate at which things are going, a merchant will become a licensed robber. By signing his name he can dip in any one's purse.'

'You are severe, M. Birotteau,' said Lourdois.

'He is right,' said old Ragon.

'Every man who fails is a suspicious character,' César went on, exasperated by the little loss which rang in his ears; it was like the huntsman's first distant halloo to a stag.

As he spoke, Chevet's steward brought his invoice, a pastry-cook's boy from Félix and the Café Foy arrived, together with the clarinet-player of Collinet's band, each with an account.

'The *Quart d'heure de Rabelais*,' smiled Ragon.

'My word, that was a splendid fête of yours,' said Lourdois.

'I am busy,' César said, and the messengers departed, leaving their invoices.

'M. Grindot,' said Lourdois, who noticed that the architect was folding up a bill which bore César's signature, 'you will check my account and see that it is all in order; you need do nothing more than run through it, all the prices have been agreed to on M. Birotteau's behalf.'

Pillerault looked at Lourdois and Grindot.

'If architect and contractor settle the prices between them, you are being robbed,' he said in his nephew's ear.

Grindot went out. Molineux followed and came up to him with a mysterious expression.

'Sir,' he remarked, 'you heard what I said, but you did not take my meaning; I wish you an umbrella when it comes on to rain.'

Fear seized on Grindot. A man clings all the more tightly to gain which is not lawfully his; such is human nature. As a matter of fact, too, this had been a labour of love for the artist; he had given all his time and his utmost skill to the alterations of the rooms; he had done five times as much as he had been paid for, and had fallen a victim to his own self-love. The contractors had had little difficulty in tempting him. And besides the

irresistible argument, there was a menace, understood though not expressed, of doing him an injury by slandering him, and there was a yet more cogent reason for yielding—the remark that Lourdois made as to the building land near the Madeleine. Clearly, Birotteau did not mean to put up a single house; he was only speculating in land.

Architects and contractors are in somewhat the same relative positions as actors and dramatists; they are dependent on each other. Grindot, to whom Birotteau left the settlement of the charges, was for the handicraftsman as against the citizen-householder. So the end of it was that three large contractors—Lourdois, Chaffaroux, and Thorien the carpenter—declared him to be 'one of those good fellows for whom it is a pleasure to work.' Grindot foresaw that the accounts on which he was to have his share would be paid, like his own fee, by bills; and this little old man had given him doubts as to whether those bills would be met. Grindot was prepared to show no mercy; after the manner of artists, the most ruthless enemies of the bourgeois.

By the end of December, César had invoices for sixty thousand francs. Félix, the Café Foy, Tanrade, and others, to whom small amounts were owing which must be paid in cash, had sent three times for the money. In business these small trifles do more harm than a heavy loss; they set rumours in circulation. A loss which every one knows is a definite thing, but panic knows no limits. Birotteau's safe was empty.

Then fear seized on the perfumer. Such a thing had never happened before in his business career. Like all people who have almost forgotten their struggles with poverty, and have little strength of character, this incident, a daily occurrence in the lives of most petty shopkeepers in Paris, troubled César's brain.

He told Célestin to send in invoices to his own customers; such an unheard-of order had to be repeated twice before the astonished first assistant understood it.

The 'clients'—the grand name that shopkeepers used to apply to their customers, and retained by César in speaking of them, in spite of his wife, who had yielded at last with a 'Call them what you like, so long as they pay us'—the 'clients' were wealthy people, who paid when they pleased; in César's business there were no bad debts, though the outstanding accounts often amounted to fifty or sixty thousand francs. The second assistant took the invoice-book, and began to copy out the largest amounts. César stood in fear of his wife. He did not wish her to see his prostration beneath the simoom of misfortune, so he determined to go out.

'Good-day, sir,' said Grindot, coming in with the careless air that artists assume when they talk of business matters, to which they say they are entirely unaccustomed. 'I cannot obtain ready money of any sort or description for your paper, so I am compelled to ask you to give me cash instead. It is a most unfortunate thing for me that I must take this step; but I have not been to the money-lenders about it; I should not like to hawk your name about; I know enough of business to know that it would be casting a slur on it; so it is to your own interest to——'

'Speak lower, sir, if you please,' said Birotteau in bewilderment. 'I am very much surprised at this.'

Lourdois came in.

'Here, Lourdois,' said Birotteau with a smile, 'do you know about this?——' he stopped short. With the good faith of a merchant who feels secure, the poor man had been about to ask Lourdois to take Grindot's bill, by way of laughing at the architect; but he saw a cloud on Lourdois's brow, and trembled at his own imprudence. The harmless joke was the death-knell of a credit not above suspicion. In such a case a rich merchant takes back his bill; he does not offer it. Birotteau felt dizzy; it was as if a stroke of a pickaxe had laid open the pit which yawned at his feet.

'My dear M. Birotteau,' said Lourdois, retiring with him to the back of the shop, 'my account has been checked and passed; I must ask you to have the money ready for me by to-morrow. My daughter is going to be married to young Crottat; he wants money, and notaries will not wait and bargain; besides, no one has ever seen my name on a bill.'

'You can send round the day after to-morrow,' said Birotteau stiffly (he counted on the payment of the invoices).—'And you also, sir,'—he spoke to Grindot

'Why can I not have it at once?' asked the architect.

'I have my men's wages to pay in the Faubourg,' said César, who had never told a lie.

He took up his hat to go with them; but the bricklayer came in with Thorien and Chaffaroux, and stopped him just as he shut the door.

'We really want the money, sir,' said Chaffaroux.

'Eh! I haven't the wealth of the Indies,' cried César, out of patience; and he quickly put a hundred paces between himself and the three visitors.—'There is something underneath all this. Confound the ball! Everybody takes you for a millionaire. Still, there was something very strange about Lourdois,' he thought; 'there is some snake in the hedge.'

He went along the Rue Saint-Honoré without thinking where he was going, feeling at a very low ebb, when at a corner of the street he ran up against Alexandre Crottat, like a battering-ram, or as one mathematician absorbed in the working of a problem might collide with another.

'Ah! sir,' exclaimed the future notary, 'one word with you! Did Roguin pay over your four hundred thousand francs to M. Claparon?'

'You were there when the thing was done. M. Claparon gave me no receipt of any kind; my bills were to be negotiated. . . . Roguin ought to have paid them to him . . . my two hundred and forty thousand

francs in coin. . . . He was told that the money was to be paid down and the transaction completed. . . . M. Popinot of the Tribunal says. . . . The vendor's receipt! . . . But . . . what makes you ask the question?'

'What makes me ask you such a question? To know whether your two hundred thousand francs are in Claparon's hands or Roguin's. Roguin is such an old acquaintance of yours, that he might have scrupled to take your money, and handed it over to Claparon; if so, you will have had a narrow escape! But how stupid I am! He has made off with them, for he has M. Claparon's money; luckily, Claparon had only paid a hundred thousand francs. Roguin has absconded; I myself paid him a hundred thousand francs for his practice without taking a receipt; I gave it him as I might give my purse to you to keep for me. Your vendors have not been paid a stiver; they have just been round to see me. The money you raised on your land has no existence for you, nor for the man of whom you borrowed it; Roguin had swallowed it like your hundred thousand francs; which er— he has not had this long while. And he has taken your last payment of a hundred thousand francs with him too; I remember going to the bank for the money.'

The pupils of César's eyes dilated so widely that he could see nothing but red flames before him.

'Your draft on the bank for a hundred thousand francs, a hundred thousand francs of mine paid for the practice, and a hundred thousand francs belonging to M. Claparon—three hundred thousand francs gone like smoke, to say nothing of the defalcations that have yet to be found out,' the young notary went on. 'They feared for Mme. Roguin's life; M. du Tillet spent the night beside her. Du Tillet himself has had a narrow escape! Roguin has been pestering him this month past to draw him into the Madeleine speculation, but, luckily, all his capital was locked up in some project of the Nucingens. Roguin wrote his wife a frightful

letter. I have just seen it. For five years he has been gambling with his clients' money, and why? To spend it on a mistress—*La belle Hollandaise*; he left her a fortnight before he made this stroke. She had squandered till she had not a farthing; her furniture was sold; she had put her name on bills of exchange. Then she hid from her creditors in a house in the Palais-Royal, and was murdered there last evening by an officer in the army. Heaven soon dealt the punishment to her who, beyond a doubt, had run through Roguin's fortune. There are women to whom nothing is sacred; think of squandering away a notary's practice!

'Mme. Roguin will have nothing except what has been secured to her by her legal mortgage, and all the scoundrel's property has been mortgaged beyond its value. The practice is to be sold for three hundred thousand francs! And I, who thought I was doing a good stroke of business, must begin by paying an extra hundred thousand francs for my practice; I hold no receipt; and there are defalcations which will eat up the value of the practice and the deposit of caution-money. The creditors will think that I am in it if I say anything about my hundred thousand francs, and you have to be very careful of your reputation when you are beginning for yourself.—You will hardly get thirty per cent. Such a brew to drink of at my age! That a man of fifty-nine should take up with a woman. . . . The old rogue! Three weeks ago he told me not to marry Césarine, and said that before long you would not have bread to eat, the monster!'

Alexandre might have talked on for a long while; Birotteau stood like a man turned to stone. Each sentence fell like a stunning blow. He heard nothing in the sounds but his death-knell; just as when Alexandre first began to speak, he had seemed to see his own house in flames. He looked so white, and stood so motionless, that Alexandre Crottat, who had taken

the worthy perfumer for a clear-headed, capable man of business, was frightened at last. Roguin's successor did not know that this stroke had swept away César's whole fortune. A swift thought of suicide flashed through the brain of the merchant, so profoundly religious by nature. In such a case suicide is a way of escape from a thousand deaths, and it seems logical to accept but one. Alexandre Crottat lent his arm, and tried to walk with him, but it was impossible—César tottered as if he had been drunk.

'Why, what is the matter with you?' asked Crottat. 'My good M. César, pluck up heart a little! It takes more than this to kill a man! Besides, you will recover forty thousand francs; the man who lent you the money had not the money to lend, and did not pay it over to you; you might plead that the contract was void.'

'My ball.—My Cross.—Two hundred thousand francs worth of my paper on the market, and nothing in the safe. . . . The Ragons, Pillerault. . . . And my wife, who saw it all!'

A shower of confused words, which called up ideas that overwhelmed him and caused unspeakable pangs, fell like hail laying waste the flower beds of the *Queen of Roses*.

'If only my head were cut off,' Birotteau cried at last; 'it is so heavy that it weighs me down, and it is good for nothing in this . . .'

'Poor old Birotteau!' said Alexandre; 'then are you in difficulties?'

'Difficulties!'

'Very well; keep up your heart and struggle with them.'

'Struggle!' echoed the perfumer.

'Du Tillet used to be your assistant; he has a level head, he will help you.'

'Du Tillet?'

'Come along!'

'Good heavens! I don't like to go home like this,' cried Birotteau. 'You that are my friend, if friends there

are, you who have dined with me, you in whom I have taken an interest, call a cab for me, for my wife's sake; and come with me, Xandrot . . .'

With no little difficulty Crottat put the inert mechanism, called César, into a cab.

'Xandrot,' he said, in a voice broken with tears, for the tears had begun to fall, and the iron band about his head seemed to be loosened a little, 'let us call at the shop. Speak to Célestin for me. My friend, tell him that it is a matter of life and death for me and for my wife. And let no one prattle about Roguin's disappearance on any pretext whatever. Ask Césarine to come down, and beg her to allow no one to say anything about it to her mother. You must beware of your best friends, Pillerault, the Ragons, everybody——'

The change in Birotteau's voice made a deep impression on Crottat, who understood the importance of the request. On their way to the magistrate, they stopped at the house in the Rue Saint-Honoré. Célestin and Césarine were horrified to see Birotteau lying back in white and speechless hebetude, as it were, in the cab.

'Keep the affair a secret for me,' said the perfumer.

'Ah!' said Xandrot to himself, 'he is coming round; I thought it was all over with him.'

The conference between Alexandre and the magistrate lasted long. The President of the Chamber of Notaries was sent for; César was taken hither and thither like a parcel; he did not stir, he did not utter a word. Towards seven o'clock in the evening Alexandre Crottat took the perfumer home again, and the thought of appearing before his wife had a bracing effect on César. The young notary had the charity to precede him, to tell Mme. Birotteau that her husband had had a sort of fit.

'His ideas are confused,' he said, making a gesture to describe a bewildered state of the brain; 'perhaps he should be bled, or leeches ought to be put on him.'

'I knew how it would be,' said Constance—nothing was

further from her thoughts than the actual disaster—'he did not take his medicine as usual at the beginning of winter, and for these two months he has been working like a galley slave, as if he had to earn his daily bread.'

So César's wife and daughter begged him to go to bed, and Dr. Haudry, Birotteau's doctor, was sent for. Old Haudry was a doctor of the school of Molière; he had a large practice, and adhered to old-fashioned methods and out-of-date formulæ; consulting-physician though he was, he drugged his patients like any quack doctor. He came, made his diagnosis, and ordered the immediate application of a sinapism to the soles of César's feet; he detected symptoms of cerebral congestion.'

'What can have brought it on?' asked Constance.

'The damp weather,' said the doctor. Césarine had given him a hint.

A doctor is often obliged professionally to talk nonsense with a learned air, to save the honour or the life of persons in health who stand about the patient's bed. The old physician had seen so much, that half a word sufficed for him. Césarine went out on to the stairs to ask about the treatment.

'Rest and quiet; then when there is less pressure on the head, we will venture on tonics.'

For two days Mme. César sat by her husband's bedside. Often she thought that he was delirious. As he lay in his wife's pretty blue chamber, he said many things, which were enigmas for Constance, at the sight of the hangings, the furniture, and the costly magnificence of the room.

'He is light-headed,' she said to Césarine, when César sat upright in bed and began solemnly to repeat scraps of the Code. 'If the personal or household expenses are considered excessive. . . . Take away those curtains!' he cried.

After three dreadful days of anxiety for César's reason, the Tourangeau's strong peasant constitution triumphed,

the pressure on the brain ceased. M. Haudry ordered cordials and a strengthening diet, and after a cup of coffee seasonably administered, César was on his feet again. Constance, worn out, took her husband's place.

'Poor thing!' said César, when he saw her sleeping.

'Come, papa, take courage! You have so much talent, that you will triumph over this. Never mind. M. Anselme will help you,' and Césarine murmured the sweet, vague words, made still sweeter by tenderness, which put courage into the most sorely defeated, as a mother's crooning songs soothe the pain of a teething infant.

'Yes, child, I will struggle. But not a word of this to any one whatever; not to Popinot, who loves us, nor to your uncle. In the first place, I will write to my brother; he is a canon, I believe, a priest attached to a cathedral. He spends nothing, so he must have saved something. Five thousand francs put by every year for twenty years —he ought to have a hundred thousand francs. Priests have credit in country places.'

Césarine, in her hurry to set a little table and the necessaries for writing a letter before her father, brought the remainder of the rose-coloured cards for the ball.

'Burn them all!' cried the merchant. 'The devil alone could have put the notion of that ball into my head. If I fail, it will look as if I were a rogue. Come, let us go straight to the point.'

César's Letter to François Birotteau.

'My dear Brother,—My business is passing through a crisis so difficult that I implore you to send me all the money at your disposal, even if you are obliged to borrow.—Yours truly, César.

'Your niece Césarine, who is with me as I write this letter, while my poor wife is asleep, desires to be remembered to you, and sends her love.'

This postscript was added at Césarine's instance. She gave the letter to Raguet.

'Father,' said she, when she came up again, 'here is M. Lebas, who wants to speak to you.'

'M. Lebas!' cried César, starting as though misfortune had made a criminal of him, 'a judge!'

'Dear M. Birotteau,' said the stout merchant-draper as he came in, 'I take too deep an interest in you—knowing each other so long as we have, and being elected judges together, as we were, for the first time—not to let you know that one Bidault, otherwise Gigonnet, has bills of yours made payable to his order, *without guarantee*, by the firm of Claparon. Those two words are not merely an insult; they give a fatal shake to your credit.'

'M. Claparon would like to speak with you,' said Célestin, putting in his head; 'am I to show him up?'

'We shall soon hear the why and wherefore of this affront,' remarked Lebas.

'This is M. Lebas, sir,' said César, as Claparon came in; 'he is a judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, and my friend——'

'Oh! the gentleman is M. Lebas, is he?' said Claparon, interrupting César, 'delighted to make his acquaintance; M. Lebas of the Tribunal, there are so many Lebas, to say nothing of the *hauts* and the *bas*——'

'He has seen the bills which I gave to you, and which (so you told me) should not be negotiated,' Birotteau went on, interrupting the rattle in his turn; 'he has seen them with the words "without guarantee" written upon them.'

'Well,' said Claparon, 'and as a matter of fact they will not be negotiated; they are in the hands of a man with whom I do a great deal of business—old Bidault. That is why I put "without guarantee" on them. If the bills had been meant to be put in circulation, you would have made them to his order in the first place. M. Lebas, as a judge, will understand my position. What

do the bills represent? The price of some landed property. To be paid by whom? By Birotteau. Why would you have me guarantee Birotteau by my signature? We must, each of us, pay our share of the aforesaid price. Now, isn't it enough to be jointly and severally responsible to the vendors? I have made an inflexible rule in business: I no more give my signature for nothing than I give a receipt for money that is still to be paid. I assume the worst. Who signs, pays. I don't want to be laid open to pay three times over.'

'Three times,' said César.

'Yes, sir,' said Claparon. 'I have already guaranteed Birotteau to the vendors; why should I guarantee him again to the bill-discounter? Our case is a hard one; Roguin goes off with a hundred thousand francs of mine; so, even now, my half of the land is costing me five hundred thousand instead of four. Roguin has taken two hundred and forty thousand francs belonging to Birotteau. What would you do in my place, M. Lebas? Put yourself in my shoes. I have not the honour of being known to you, any more than I know M. Birotteau. Do you take me? We go halves in a business speculation. You pay down all your share of the money in cash; and as for me, I give bills for my share. I offer you the bills, and out of excessive benevolence you take them and give money for them. You learn that Claparon the rich banker, looked up to by every one—I accept all the virtues in the world—that the virtuous Claparon is in difficulties for a matter of six millions; would you select that moment to give your name as a guarantee for mine? You would be mad! Well, now, M. Lebas, Birotteau is in the position in which I imagined Claparon to be. Don't you see that in that case, being jointly and severally responsible, I may be made to pay the purchasers; that I can be called upon to pay a second time for Birotteau's

share to the extent of his bills, that is, if I back them, without having——'

'Pay whom?' interrupted the perfumer.

'Without having his half of the land,' pursued Claparon, heedless of the interruption, 'for I should have no hold on him; so I should have to buy it over again. So—I might pay three times over.'

'Repay whom?' insisted Birotteau.

'Why, the holder of the bills; if I endorsed them, and you came to grief.'

'I shall not fail, sir,' said Birotteau.

'All right,' said Claparon. 'You have been a judge, you are a clever man of business, you know that we ought to provide for all contingencies, so do not be astonished if I act in a business-like way.'

'M. Claparon is right,' said Joseph Lebas.

'I am right,' continued Claparon, 'right from a business point of view. But this is a question of landed property. Now, what ought I myself to receive?—Money, for the vendors must be paid in coin. Let us set aside the two hundred and forty thousand francs, which M. Birotteau will find, I am sure,' said Claparon, looking at Lebas. 'I came to ask you for the trifling sum of twenty-five thousand francs,' he added, looking at Birotteau.

'Twenty-five thousand francs!' cried César, and it seemed to him that the blood turned to ice in his veins. 'But, sir, what for?'

'Eh! my dear sir, we are bound to sign, seal, and deliver the deeds in the presence of a notary. Now, as to paying for the land, we may arrange that among ourselves, but when the Treasury comes in—your humble servant! The Treasury does not amuse itself with idle words; it allows you credit from your hand to your pocket, and we shall have to come down with the money—forty-four thousand francs this week in law expenses. I was far from expecting reproaches when I

came here; for, thinking that you might find it inconvenient to pay twenty-five thousand francs, I was going to tell you that by the merest chance I had saved for you——'

'What?' asked Birotteau, giving in that word that cry of distress which no man can mistake.

'A trifle! Twenty-five thousand francs in bills given to you by one and another, which Roguin gave me to discount. I have credited you with the amount as against the registration and other expenses; I will send you the account; there is a little matter to deduct for discounting them, and six or seven thousand francs will still be owing to me.'

'This all seems to me to be perfectly fair,' said Lebas. 'In the place of this gentleman, who appears to me to understand business very well, I should act the same towards a stranger.'

'This will not be the death of M. Birotteau,' said Claparon; 'it takes more than one blow to kill an old wolf; I have seen wolves with bullets in their heads running about like—Lord, yes, like wolves.'

'Who could have foreseen such rascality on Roguin's part?' asked Lebas, as much alarmed by César's dumbness as by so vast a speculation outside the perfumery trade.

'A little more, and I should have given this gentleman a receipt for four hundred thousand francs,' said Claparon, 'and I was in a stew. I had paid over a hundred thousand francs to Roguin the night before. Our mutual confidence saved me. It would have seemed to us all a matter of indifference whether the money should be lying at his office or in my possession till the day when the contracts were completed.'

'It would have been much better if each had deposited his money with the Bank of France till the time came for paying it over,' said Lebas.

'Roguin was as good as the Bank, I thought,' said

César. 'But he too is in this business,' he added, looking at Claparon.

'Yes, for a fourth, and in name only,' answered Claparon. 'After the imbecility of allowing him to go off with my money, there is but one thing more out-and-out idiotic—and that would be to make him a present of some more. If he sends me back my hundred thousand francs, and two hundred thousand more on his own account, then we will see! But he will take good care not to put the money into an affair that must simmer for four years before you have a spoonful of soup. If he has only gone off with three hundred thousand francs, as they say, he will want quite fifty thousand livres a year to live decently abroad.'

'The bandit!'

'Eh! goodness! An infatuation for a woman brought Roguin to that pass,' said Claparon. 'What man at his age can answer for it that he will not be mastered and carried away by a last fancy? Not one of us, sober as we are, can tell where it will end. A last love is the most violent. Look at Cardot, and Camusot, and Matifat—every one of them has a mistress! And if all of us are gulled, is it not our own fault? How was it that we did not suspect a notary who speculated on his own account? Any notary, any bill-broker, or stock-broker who does business on his own account, is not to be trusted. Failure for them is fraudulent bankruptcy; they are sent up to the Court of Assize for trial; so, of course, they prefer a foreign court. I shall not make that blunder again. Well, well, we are all too weak to pass judgment by default on a man with whom we have dined, who has given grand balls, a man in society, in fact! Nobody complains; it is wrong.'

'Very wrong,' said Birotteau. 'The provisions of the law with regard to liquidations and insolvency ought to be revised throughout.'

'If you should happen to need me,' said Lebas, addressing Birotteau, 'I am quite at your service.'

'M. Birotteau has need of no one,' said the indefatigable prattler' (du Tillet had opened the sluices after pouring in the water, and Claparon was repeating a lesson which du Tillet had very skilfully taught him). 'His position is clear. Roguin's estate will pay a dividend of fifty per cent., from what young Crottat tells me. Beside the dividend, M. César will come by the forty thousand francs which the lender on the mortgage did not pay over; he can raise more money on his property; and we have four months in which to pay two hundred thousand francs to the vendors. Between now and then M. Birotteau will meet his bills (for he ought not to reckon on meeting them with the money which Roguin made off with). But if M. Birotteau should find himself a little pinched . . . well, with one or two accommodation bills, he will pull through.'

The perfumer took heart as he listened. Claparon analysed the business, summed it up, and traced out a plan of action, as it were, for him. Gradually his expression grew decided and resolute, and he conceived a great respect for the ex-commercial traveller's business capacity. Du Tillet had thought it expedient to make Claparon believe that he was one of Roguin's victims. He had given Claparon a hundred thousand francs to give to Roguin, who returned them to du Tillet. Claparon, being uneasy, played his part to the life; he told anybody who cared to listen to him that Roguin had mulcted him of a hundred thousand francs. Du Tillet doubted Claparon's strength of mind; he fancied that principles of honesty and conscientious scruples still lingered in his puppet, and would not confide the whole of his plans to him; he knew, moreover, that his instrument was incapable of guessing at them.

A day came when his commercial go-between reproached him. 'If our first friend is not our first

dupe, we should never find a second,' said du Tillet, and he broke in pieces the tool which was no longer useful.

M. Lebas and Claparon went out together, and Birotteau was left alone.

'I can pull through,' he said to himself. 'My liabilities, in the shape of bills to be met, amount to two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs. That is to say—seventy-five thousand francs for the house, and a hundred and seventy-five thousand francs for the building-land. Now, to cover this, I have Roguin's dividend, which will amount may be to a hundred thousand francs; and I can cancel the loan on my land, that is a hundred and forty thousand francs in all. The thing to be done is to make a hundred thousand francs by the Cephalic Oil; and a few accommodation bills, or a loan from a banker, will tide me over until I can make good the loss, and the building-land reaches its enhanced value.'

When a man in misfortune once can weave a romance of hope out of the more or less solid reasonings with which he fills the pillow on which he lays his head, he is often saved. Many a one has taken the confidence given by an illusion for energy.—Perhaps the half of courage is really hope, and the Catholic religion reckons hope among the virtues. Has not hope buoyed up many a weakling, giving him time to await the chances which life brings?

Birotteau made up his mind to apply, in the first place, to his wife's uncle, and to disclose his position to his relative before going elsewhere. He went down the Rue Saint-Honoré and reached the Rue Bourdonnais, not without experiencing inward pangs, which caused such violent internal disturbance that he thought his health was deranged. There was a fire in his vitals. As a matter of fact, those whose sentience is keenest in the diaphragm suffer in that region; just as those whose faculty of perception resides in the brain suffer in the

head. In grave crises, the system is attacked at the point where the temperament locates the seat of life in the individual; weaklings have the colic, a Napoleon grows drowsy.

Before a man of honour can storm a confidence and overleap the barriers of pride, he must have felt the prick of the spur of Necessity, that hard rider, more than once. So for two days Birotteau had borne that spurring before he went to see Pillerault, and then family reasons decided him—however things might go, he must explain the position to the stern ironmonger. Yet, for all that, when he reached the door, he felt in his inmost soul as a child feels on a visit to the dentist, that his courage was sinking away; and Birotteau was not about to face a momentary pang, he quailed before a whole lifetime to come. Slowly he went up the stairs, and found the old man reading the *Constitutionnel* by the fireside; on a little round table his frugal breakfast was set—a roll, butter, Brie cheese, and a cup of coffee.

'There is real wisdom,' said Birotteau to himself, and he envied his uncle's life.

'Well,' said Pillerault, laying down his spectacles, 'I heard about Roguin's affair yesterday at the Café David; so his mistress, *La belle Hollandaise*, is murdered! I hope that, warned by us who want to be actual proprietors, you have been to Claparon and taken a receipt?'

'Alas! uncle, that is just it; you have laid your finger on the spot. No.'

'Oh, bother! you are ruined,' said Pillerault, dropping his paper; and Birotteau picked it up, although it was the *Constitutionnel.*

This thought was such a shock, that Pillerault's stern features, always like a profile on a coin, grew hard as if they had been struck in bronze. He stared with steady eyes that saw nothing, through the windows, at the opposite wall, and listened while Birotteau poured out a

long discourse. Evidently while he heard he deliberated; he was pondering the case with the inflexibility of a Minos who crossed the Styx of commerce, when he left the Quai des Morfondus for his little third-floor dwelling.

'Well, uncle?' asked Birotteau at last, expecting some answer to a final entreaty to sell *rentes* worth sixty thousand francs a year.

'Well, my poor nephew, I cannot do it. Things have gone too far. We, the Ragons and I, shall both lose fifty thousand francs. It was by my advice that the good folk sold their shares in the Vortschin Mines. I feel myself bound, if they lose the money, not to replace their capital, but to give them a helping hand, and to help my niece and Césarine. You might perhaps all of you want bread, and you must come to me——'

'Bread, uncle?'

'Well, yes, bread. Just look the facts in the face: *you will not pull through!* Out of five thousand six hundred francs a year, I will set aside four thousand to divide between you and the Ragons. When your disaster comes, I know Constance, she will slave and deny herself everything—and so will you, César!'

'There is hope yet, uncle.'

'I do not see it as you do.'

'I will prove the contrary.'

'Nothing would please me better.'

Birotteau went without an answer for Pillerault. He had come to find comfort and encouragement, he had received a second blow; a blow less heavy than the first one, it is true; but whereas the first had been dealt at his head, this thrust had gone to his heart, and the poor man's life lay in his affections. He had gone down part of the way, and then he turned and went up again.

'Sir,' he said, in a constrained voice, 'Constance knows nothing of this, keep the secret for me at least; and beg

the Ragons not to disturb the peace that I need if I am to fight against misfortune.'

Pillerault made a sign of assent.

'Take courage, César,' he said. 'I see that you are angry with me, but some day you will acknowledge that I am right, when you think of your wife and daughter.'

Discouraged by this opinion given by his uncle, whose clear-headedness he acknowledged, César suddenly dropped from the heights of hope into the miry slough of uncertainty. When a man's affairs take an ugly turn like this, he is apt to become the plaything of circumstances, unless he is of Pillerault's temper; he follows other people's ideas, or his own, much as a wayfarer pursues a will-o'-the-wisp. He allows himself to be swept away by the whirlwind when he should either lie prostrate with his eyes shut, and let it pass over him, or rise and watch the direction that it takes, to escape the blast. In the midst of his anguish, Birotteau bethought himself of the necessary steps to be taken with regard to his loan. He went to see Derville, a consulting barrister in the Rue Vivienne, so as to set about it the sooner, if Derville should see any chance of cancelling the contract. Him he found sitting, wrapped in his white flannel dressing-gown, by the fireside, staid and self-possessed, as is the wont of men of law, accustomed as they are to the most harrowing disclosures. Birotteau felt, as a new thing in his experience, this necessary coolness; it was like ice to an excited man like Birotteau telling the story of his misfortunes, smarting from the wounds that he had received, stricken with the fever induced by the risks his fortunes were running, and cruelly beset, since honour and life and wife and child were all imperilled.

'If it is proved,' said Derville, when he had heard him out, 'that the lender no longer had in Roguin's keeping the sum of money which Roguin induced you to borrow of him, as there has been no transfer of the actual money,

the contract might be annulled, and the lender will have his remedy (as you also will have for your hundred thousand francs) in Roguin's caution-money. In that case, I will answer for your lawsuit, so far as it is possible to answer for any action at law, for no action is a foregone conclusion.'

The opinion of so learned an expert put a little heart into Birotteau. He begged Derville to obtain a judgment within a fortnight. The advocate answered to the effect that Birotteau might be obliged to wait three months before the contract would be annulled.

'Three months!' cried Birotteau, who thought that he had found an expedient for raising money at once.

'Well, if you yourself succeed in gaining a prompt hearing for your case, we cannot hurry your opponent to suit your pace; he will take advantage of the delays of procedure; advocates are not always at the Palais; who knows but that the other party will let judgment go against him by default? And he will appeal. You can't set your own pace, my dear sir!' said Derville, smiling.

'But at the Tribunal of Commerce——'

'Oh!' said the advocate, 'the Consular Tribunal is one thing, and the Tribunal of First Instance is another. You do things in a slashing way over yonder. Now, at the Palais de Justice there are formalities to be gone through. These formalities are the bulwarks of Justice. How would you like it if a demand for forty thousand francs was suddenly fired off at you? Well, your opponent, who will see that amount compromised, will dispute it. Delays are the *chevaux-de-frise* of the law.'

'You are right,' said Birotteau, and he took leave of Derville with a deadly chill at his heart.—'They are all right. Money! Money!' cried the perfumer, out in the street, talking to himself, as is the wont of busy men in this turbulent seething Paris, which a modern poet calls 'a vat.'

As he came into his shop, one of the assistants, who

had been out delivering invoices to the customers, told him that as the New Year was at hand, every one had torn off the receipt-form at the foot and kept the invoices.

'Then there is no money anywhere!' Birotteau exclaimed aloud in the shop. All the assistants looked up at this, and he bit his lips.

In this way five days went by; and during those five days Braschon, Lourdois, Thorien, Grindot, Chaffaroux, and all the creditors whose bills remained unpaid, passed through the chameleon's intermediate transitions of tone, from the serene hues of confidence to the wrathful red of the commercial Bellona. In Paris, in such crises, suspicion is as quick to reach the panic stage as confidence is slow to show expansive symptoms; and when a creditor once adopts the restringent system of doubts and precautions in business relations, he is apt to descend to underhand villainies that put him below his debtor's level. From cringing civility, the creditors passed successively through the inflammatory phase, the red of impatience, the lurid coruscations of importunity, to outbursts of disappointment, and from the cold-blue stage of making up their minds to the black insolence of threatening to serve a writ.

Braschon, the rich furniture-dealer of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, who had not been included in the invitations to the ball, sounded to arms in his quality of the creditor whose self-love has been wounded. Paid he meant to be, and within twenty-four hours; he required security, not deposits of furniture, but a second mortgage, the mortgage for forty thousand francs on the property in the Faubourg du Temple. In spite of their furious recriminations, these gentry still left César occasional intervals of peace, when he might breathe; but instead of bringing a resolute will to carry these outworks of an awkward position, and so putting an end to them, Birotteau was taxing all his wits to keep the state

of things from the knowledge of his wife, and the one person who could give him counsel knew nothing of his difficulties. He stood sentinel on the threshold of his shop. He confided his momentary inconvenience to Célestin, who watched his employer with curious and astonished eyes; already César had fallen somewhat in his esteem, as men accustomed to prosperity are apt to dwindle when evil days discover that all their power consists in the increased facility of dealing with matters of everyday experience, acquired by an ordinary intelligence.

But if César lacked the mental energy required for defending himself when attacked at so many points at once, he had sufficient courage to face his position. Before the 15th of January he required the sum of sixty thousand francs, and thirty thousand of these were due on the 31st of December. Part of this sum was owing for the house, part for rent and accounts to be paid in ready money, part of it in bills to be met; with all his efforts he could only collect twenty thousand francs, so that there was a deficit of ten thousand, to be made up by the end of the month. Nothing seemed hopeless to him, for he had already ceased to look beyond the present moment, and, like an adventurer, had begun to live from day to day. At length he resolved to make what for him was a bold stroke. Before it was known that he was in difficulties, he would apply to François Keller, banker, orator, and philanthropist, widely known for his beneficence, and for his desire to stand well with the mercantile world of Paris, always with a view to representing their interests one day as a deputy in the Chamber. In politics the banker was a Liberal, and César was a Royalist; but the perfumer decided that the capitalist was a man after his own heart, and that a difference of opinion in politics was but one reason the more for opening an account. If paper should be necessary, he did not doubt Popinot's devotion, and counted

upon obtaining from him some thirty bills of a thousand francs each; with these he might hold out until he gained his lawsuit, the forty thousand francs involved in it being offered as security to the most urgent creditors.

The effusive soul, who was wont to confide to the pillow of his dear Constance the least emotions of his existence, who drew his courage from her, and was wont to seek of her the light thrown by contradiction on all topics, was cut off from all exchange of ideas with his first assistant, his uncle, and his wife, and found that the weight of his cares was thereby doubled. Yet this self-sacrificing martyr preferred suffering alone to the alternative of casting his wife's soul into the fiery furnace; he would tell her about the danger when it was past. Perhaps, too, he shrank from telling her the hideous secret; he stood in some fear of his wife, and this fear lent him courage. He went every morning to low mass at Saint-Roch, and told his troubles to God.

'If I do not meet a soldier on my way back from Saint-Roch, I will take it as a sign that my prayer is heard. It shall be God's answer to me,' he said to himself, after he had prayed for deliverance.

And, for his happiness, he did not meet a soldier. Yet, nevertheless, his heart was over-full, and he needed another human heart to whom he could make moan. Césarine, to whom he had already told the fatal news, learned the whole truth, and stolen glances were exchanged between them, glances fraught with despair or repressed hope, passionate invocations, appeals, and sympathetic responses, answering gleams of intelligence between soul and soul. For his wife César put on high spirits and mirth. If Constance asked any question—'Pshaw, everything was all right. Popinot' (to whom César gave not a thought) 'was doing well! The Oil was selling! Claparon's bills would be met; there was nothing to fear.' The hollow merriment was ghastly. When his wife lay sleeping amid the splendours,

Birotteau would rise, and fall to thinking over his misfortune; and more than once Césarine came in, in her night-shift, barefooted, with a shawl about her white shoulders.

'Papa, you are crying; I can hear you,' she would say, and she would cry herself as she spoke.

When César had written to ask the great François Keller to make an appointment with him, he fell into such a state of torpor that Césarine persuaded him to walk out with her. In the streets of Paris he saw nothing but huge red placards, and the words CEPHALIC OIL in staring letters everywhere met his eyes.

While the glory of the *Queen of Roses* was thus waning in disastrous gloom, the firm of A. Popinot was dawning radiant with the sunrise splendours of success. Anselme had taken counsel of Gaudissart and Finot, and had launched his oil boldly. During the past three days two thousand placards had been posted in the most conspicuous situations in Paris. Every one in the streets was confronted with the Cephalic Oil, and willy-nilly must read the pithy remarks from Finot's pen as to the impossibility of stimulating the growth of the hair, and the perils attendant on dyeing it, together with an extract from a paper read before the Academie des Sciences by Vauquelin. It was as good as a certificate of existence for dead hair, thus held out to those who should use the Cephalic Oil. The shop-doors of every perfumer, hair-dresser, and wigmaker in Paris were made glorious with gilded frames, containing a beautiful design, printed on vellum paper, with a reduced facsimile of the picture of *Hero and Leander* at the top, and beneath it ran the motto, *The ancient peoples of antiquity preserved their hair by the use of* CEPHALIC OIL.

'He has thought of permanent frames; he has found an advertisement that will last for ever!' said Birotteau to himself, as he stood staring in dull amazement at the shop-front of the *Silver Bell*.

'Then you did not see a frame on your own door?' asked his daughter. 'M. Anselme brought it himself, and left three hundred bottles of the oil with Célestin.'

'No, I did not see it,' he answered.

'And Célestin has already sold fifty to chance comers, and sixty to our own customers.'

'Oh!' said César.

The sound of myriad bells that misery sets ringing in the ears of her victims had made the perfumer dizzy; his head seemed to spin round and round in those days. Popinot had waited a whole hour to speak with him on the day before, and had gone away after chatting with Constance and Césarine; the women told him that César was very busy over his great scheme.

'Oh yes, the building-land!' Popinot had said.

Luckily, Popinot had not left the Rue des Cinq-Diamants for a month; he had worked day and night at his business, and had seen neither Ragon, nor Pillerault, nor his uncle. The poor lad was never in bed before two o'clock in the morning; he had only two assistants, and at the rate at which things were going he would soon have work enough for four. Opportunity is everything in business; success is a horse which, if caught by the mane and ridden by a bold rider, will carry him on to fortune. Popinot told himself that he should receive a welcome when, at the end of six months, he could carry the news to his aunt and uncle—'I am saved; my fortune is made!'—a welcome, too, from Birotteau when, at the end of the first half year, he should bring him his share of the profits—thirty or forty thousand francs! He had not heard of Roguin's disappearance, nor of César's consequent disasters and difficulties; so that he could not let fall any indiscreet remarks in Madame Birotteau's presence.

Popinot had promised Finot five hundred francs for each of the leading newspapers (ten in all), and three hundred francs for each second-rate paper (and of these,

too, there were ten), if the Cephalic Oil was mentioned three times a month in each. Of those eight thousand francs, Finot beheld three thousand as his own, his first stake to lay on the vast green table of speculation. So he had sprung like a lion upon his friends and acquaintances; he haunted newspaper offices; writers of newspaper articles awoke from slumber to find him sitting by their pillows; and the evening found him pacing the lobbies of all the theatres. 'Remember my oil, my dear fellow; it is nothing to me; a matter of good fellowship, you know; Gaudissart, a jolly dog.' With this formula, his harangues always began and ended. He filled up spaces at the foot of the last columns in the papers, and left the money to those upon the staff. He was as cunning as any super who is minded to transform himself into an actor, and as active as an errand boy on sixty francs a month; he wrote insinuating letters, he worked on the vanity of all and sundry, he did dirty work for editors, to the end that his paragraphs might be inserted in their papers. His enthusiastic energy left no means untried—money, dinners, platitudes. By means of tickets for the play he corrupted the men who finish off the columns towards midnight with short paragraphs of small news items already set up; hanging about the printing-office for that purpose, as if he had proofs to revise.

So by dint of making every one his friend, Finot secured the triumph of the Cephalic Oil over the *Pâte de Regnault* and the *Mixture Brésilienne*, over all the inventions, in fact, whose promoters had the wit to comprehend the influence of journalism and the effect produced upon the public mind by the piston stroke of the reiterated paragraph. In that age of innocence, journalists, like draught-oxen, were unaware of their strength; their heads ran on actresses—Mesdemoiselles Florine, Tullia, Mariette—they lorded it over all creation, and made no practical use of their powers. In Andoche's propositions

there was no actress to be applauded, no drama to be put upon the stage; he did not ask them to make a success of his vaudevilles, nor to pay him for his paragraphs; on the contrary, he offered money in season and opportune breakfasts; so there was not a newspaper that did not mention the Cephalic Oil, and how that it was in accordance with Vauquelin's investigations; not a journal that did not scoff at the superstition that the hair could be induced to grow, and proclaim the danger of dyeing it.

These paragraphs rejoiced Gaudissart's heart. He laid in a supply of papers wherewith to demolish prejudice in the provinces, and accomplished the manœuvre known among speculators since his time as 'taking the public by storm.' In those days newspapers from Paris exercised a great influence in the departments, the hapless country districts being still 'without organs.' The Paris newspaper, therefore, was taken up as a serious study, and read through from the heading to the printer's name on the last line of the last page, where the irony of persecuted opinion might be supposed to lurk.

Gaudissart, thus supported by the press, had a brilliant success from the very first in every town where his tongue had play. Every provincial shopkeeper was anxious for a frame and copies of *Hero and Leander*. Finot devised that charming joke against Macassar Oil, which drew such laughter at the Funambules, when Pierrot takes up an old house-brush, visibly worn down to the holes, and rubs it with Macassar Oil, and lo the stump becomes a mop, a piece of irony which brought down the house. In later days Finot would gaily relate how that but for those three thousand francs he must have died of want and misery. For him three thousand francs was a fortune. In this campaign he discovered the power of advertising, which he was to wield so wisely and so much to his own profit. Three months later this pioneer was the editor of a small paper, of

which after a time he became the proprietor, and so laid the foundation of his fortune. Even as the Illustrious Gaudissart, that Murat among commercial travellers, 'took the public by storm,' and gained brilliant victories along the frontiers and in the provinces for the house of Popinot, so did the cause gain ground in public opinion in Paris, thanks to the desperate assault upon the newspapers, which gave it the prompt publicity likewise secured by the *Mixture Brésilienne* and the *Pâte de Regnault*. Three fortunes were made by this means, and then began the descent of the thousands of ambitious tradesmen who have since gone down by battalions into the arena of journalism, and there called advertising into being. A mighty revolution was wrought.

At that moment the words 'Popinot & Company' were flaunting on every wall and shop door; and Birotteau, unable to measure the enormous area over which these announcements were displayed, contented himself with saying to Césarine, 'Little Popinot is following in my footsteps,' without comprehending the difference of the times, without appreciation of the new methods and improved means of communication which spread intelligence much more rapidly than heretofore.

Birotteau had not set foot in his factory since the ball; he did not know how busy and energetic Popinot had been. Anselme had set all Birotteau's operatives on the work, and slept in the place. He saw Césarine sitting on every packing-case and reclining on every package; her face looked at him from each new invoice. 'She will be my wife!' he said to himself, as with coat thrown off, and shirt-sleeves rolled above the elbows, he hammered in the nails with all his might, while his assistants were sent out on business.

The next day, after spending the whole night in pondering what to say and what not to say to the great banker, Cesar reached the Rue du Houssaye, and entered, with a

heart that beat painfully fast, the mansion of the Liberal financier, the adherent of a political party accused, and not unjustly, of desiring the downfall of the Bourbons. To Birotteau, as to most small merchants in Paris, the manners and customs and the personality of those who move in high financial circles were quite unknown; for the smaller traders usually deal with lesser houses, which form a sort of intermediate term, a highly satisfactory arrangement for the great capitalists, who find in them one guarantee the more.

Constance and Birotteau, who had never overdrawn their balance, who had never known what it was to have no money in the safe, and no bills in the portfolio, had not had recourse to these banks of the second order; and, for the best of reasons, were entirely unknown in the higher financial world. Perhaps it is a mistaken policy sedulously to abstain from borrowing even though you may not require the money; opinions differ on this head; but be that as it may, Birotteau at that moment deeply regretted that he had never put his signature to a piece of paper. Yet, as he was known as a deputy-mayor and a shrewd man of business, he imagined that he would only have to mention his name, and he should see the banker at once; he did not know that men flocked to the Kellers' audiences as to the court of a king. In the ante-chamber of the study occupied by the man with so many claims to greatness, Birotteau found himself among a crowd composed of deputies, writers, journalists, stockbrokers, great merchants, men of business, engineers, and, above all, of familiars, who made their way through the groups of speakers and knocked in a particular manner at the door of the study, where they had the privilege of entry.

'What am I in the middle of this machinery?' Birotteau asked himself, quite bewildered by the stir and bustle in this factory, where so much brain-power was at work furnishing daily bread for the camp of the Opposi-

tion ; this theatre where rehearsals of the grand tragi-comedy played by the Left were wont to take place.

On one hand he heard a discussion relative to a loan that was being negotiated to complete the construction of the principal lines of canal recommended by the Department of Roads and Bridges; a question of millions! On the other, journalists, the bankers' jackals, were talking of yesterday's sitting and of their patron's *extempore* speech. During the two hours while he waited, he saw the banker-politician thrice emerge from his cabinet, accompanying some visitor of importance for a few paces through the ante-chamber. Keller went as far as the door with the last—General Foy.

'It is all over with me!' Birotteau said to himself, and something clutched at his heart.

As the great banker returned to his cabinet, the whole troop of courtiers, friends, and followers crowded after him, like the canine race about some attractive female of the species. One or two bolder curs slipped in spite of him into the audience chamber. The conferences lasted for five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. Some went away visibly chop-fallen ; some with a satisfied look ; some assumed important airs. Time went by, and Birotteau looked anxiously at the clock. No one paid the slightest attention to the man with a secret care, sighing restlessly in the gilded chair by the hearth, at the very door of the closet that contained that panacea for all troubles—credit.

Dolefully César thought how that he too in his own house, and for a little while, had been a king, as this man was, morning after morning ; and he fathomed the depths of the abyss into which he was falling. He had bitter thoughts! How many unshed tears were crowded into those two hours! How many petitions he put up that this man might incline a favourable ear ; for beneath the husk of popularity-seeking good-nature, Birotteau instinctively felt that there lurked in Keller an

insolent, tyrannous, and violent temper, a brutal craving to domineer, which alarmed his meek nature. At length, when but ten or a dozen people were left, Birotteau determined to start up when the outer door of the audience chamber creaked on its hinges, and to put himself on a level with the great public speaker with the remark, 'I am Birotteau!' The first grenadier who flung himself into the redoubt at Borodino did not display more courage than the perfumer when he made up his mind to carry out this manœuvre.

'After all,' said he to himself, 'I am his deputy-mayor,' and he rose to give his name.

François Keller's countenance took on an amiable expression; clearly he meant to be civil; he glanced at Birotteau's red ribbon, turned, opened the door of his cabinet, and indicated the way; but stayed behind himself for a while to speak with two new-comers who sprang up the staircase with tempestuous speed.

'Decazes would like to speak with you,' said one of these two.

'It is a question of making an end of the Pavillon Marsan! The King sees clearly. He is coming over to us!' cried the other.

'We will all go to the Chambers,' returned the banker, and he entered his cabinet with the air of the frog that would fain be an ox.

'How can he think of his own affairs?' thought César, overwhelmed.

The radiance of the sun of superiority dazzled the perfumer, as the light blinds those insects which can only exist in the shade or in the dusk of a summer night.

Birotteau saw a copy of the Budget lying on a vast table, among piles of pamphlets and volumes of the *Moniteur*, which lay open, displaying marked passages, past utterances of a Minister, which were shortly to be hurled at his head; he was to be made to eat his words amid the plaudits of a crowd of dunces, incapable of

comprehending that events modify everything. On another table stood a collection of boxes full of papers, a heap of memorials and projects, the thousand and one reports confided to a man in whose exchequer every nascent industry endeavours to dip.

The regal splendour of the cabinet, filled with pictures and statues and works of art; the litter on the chimney-piece; the accumulations of documents relating to business concerns at home and abroad, heaped up like bales of goods,—all these things impressed Birotteau; he dwindled in his own eyes, his nervousness increased, the blood ran cold in his veins.

On François Keller's desk there lay some bundles of bills, letters of exchange, and circular-letters. To these the great man addressed himself; and as he swiftly put his signature to those that required no examination, 'To what do I owe the honour of your visit, sir?' asked he.

At these words addressed to him alone, by the voice that spoke to all Europe, while the restless hand never ceased to traverse the paper, the poor perfumer felt as if a red-hot iron had been thrust through his vitals. His face forthwith assumed that ingratiating expression with which the banker had grown familiar during ten years of experience; the expression always meant that the wearers desired to involve the house of Keller in some affair of great importance to the would-be borrowers and to no one else, an expression which shuts the banker's doors upon them at once. So François Keller shot a glance at César, a Napoleonic glance, which seemed to go through the perfumer's head. This imitation of their Emperor was a slight piece of affectation which certain parvenus permitted themselves, though the false coin was scarcely a passable copy of the true. For César, of the extreme Right in politics, the fanatical partisan of the Government, the factor in the monarchical election, that glance was like the stamp which a custom-house officer sets on a bale of goods.

'I do not want to take up your minutes unduly, sir; I will be brief. I have come on a simple matter of private business, to know if you will open a loan account with me. As an ex-judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, and a man well known at the Bank of France, you can understand that if I had bills to discount I should only have to apply to the Bank where you are a Governor. I have had the honour of being associated in my functions at the Tribunal with M. le Baron Thibon, the head of the bill-discounting department, and he certainly would not refuse me. But as I have never tried to borrow money nor accepted a bill, my signature is unknown, and you know how many difficulties lie in the way of negotiating a loan in such a case——'

Keller moved his head; and Birotteau, construing this as a sign of impatience, continued—

'The fact is, sir, that I have engaged in a speculation in land, outside my own line of business——'

François Keller, still signing and reading, and, to all appearance, paying no attention to César's remarks, turned at this, with a sign that he was following what was said. Birotteau took heart; his affair was in a promising way, he thought; he breathed more freely.

'Go on; I understand,' said Keller good-humouredly.

'I am the purchaser of one-half of the building-land near the Madeleine.'

'Yes. I heard from Nucingen of the big affair that the firm of Claparon is negotiating.'

'Well,' the perfumer went on, 'a loan of a hundred thousand francs, secured on my share of the land, or on my business, would suffice to tide me over until I can touch the profits which must shortly accrue from a venture in my own way of business. If necessary, I would cover the amount by bills drawn on a new firm—Popinot & Company, a young house which——'

Keller seemed to be very little interested in this description of the firm of Popinot, and Birotteau gathered

that he had somehow taken a wrong turn; he stopped; then, in dismay at the pause, he went on again—

'As for the interest, we——'

'Yes, yes,' said the banker; 'the thing may be arranged, and do not doubt my desire to meet you in the matter. Occupied as I am, I have all the finances of Europe on my hands, and the Chamber absorbs every moment of my time, so you will not be surprised to hear that I leave the investigation of a vast amount of regular business to my managers. Go downstairs, and see my brother Adolphe; explain the nature of your guarantees to him; and if he assents, return here with him to-morrow or the day after, at the time when I look into affairs of this kind, at five o'clock in the morning. We shall be proud and happy to receive your confidence; you are one of the consistent Royalists; and your esteem is the more flattering, since that politically we may find ourselves at enmity.'

'Sir,' said the perfumer, elated by this oratorical flourish, 'I am as deserving of the honour you do me as of the signal mark of Royal favour . . . not unmerited by the discharge of my functions at the Consular Tribunal, and by fighting for——'

'Yes,' continued the banker, 'the reputation which you enjoy is a passport, M. Birotteau. You are sure to propose nothing that is not feasible, and you can reckon upon our co-operation.'

A door, which Birotteau had not noticed, was opened, and a woman entered; it was Mme. Keller, one of the two daughters of the Comte de Gondreville, a peer of France.

'I hope I shall see you, dear, before you go to the Chamber,' said she.

'It is two o'clock,' exclaimed the banker; 'the battle has begun. Excuse me, sir,—the question is one of upsetting a ministry——' he went as far as the door of the salon with the perfumer, and bade a man in livery, 'Take this gentleman to M. Adolphe.'

Birotteau traversed a labyrinth of staircases on the way to a private office, less sumptuous than the cabinet of the head of the firm, but more business-like in appearance, he was borne along by an *if*, that easiest pacing mount that hope can furnish; he stroked his chin, and thought that the great man's compliments augured excellently well for his plans. It was regrettable that a man so amiable, so capable, so great an orator, should be inimical to the Bourbons.

Still full of these illusions, he entered M. Adolphe Keller's sanctum, a bare, chilly-looking room. Dingy curtains hung in the windows, the floor was covered with a much-worn carpet, and the furniture consisted of a couple of cylinder desks and one or two office chairs. This cabinet was to the first as the kitchen to the dining-room, as the factory to the shop. Here matters of business were penetrated to the core, here enterprises were analysed, and preliminary charges levied by the bank on all promising undertakings. Here originated all those bold strokes for which the Kellers were so well known in the highest commercial regions, when they would secure and rapidly exploit a monopoly in a few days. Here, too, omissions on the part of the legislature received careful attention, and unblushing demands were made for 'sops in the pan' (in the language of the Stock Exchange), that is to say, for money paid in consideration for small indefinable services, for standing godfather to an infant enterprise, and so accrediting it. Here were woven those tissues of fraud after a legal pattern, which consist in investing money as a sleeping-partner in some concern in temporary difficulties, with a view to slaughtering the affair as soon as it succeeds; the brothers would lie in wait, call in their capital at a critical moment, an ugly manœuvre that put the whole thing in their own hands, and involved the hapless active partner in their toils.

The two brothers adopted separate *rôles*. On high

stood François, the politician, the man of brilliant parts; he bore himself like a king, he distributed favours and promises, he made himself agreeable to every one. Everything was easy when you spoke with him; he did business royally; he poured out the heady wine of fair words, which intoxicated inexperienced speculators and promoters of new schemes; he developed their own ideas for them. But Adolphe below absolved his brother on the score of political preoccupations, and cleverly raked in the winnings; he was the responsible brother, the one who was hard to persuade, so that there were two words to every bargain concluded with that treacherous house, and not seldom the gracious Yes of the sumptuous cabinet was transmuted into a dry No in Adolphe's office.

This manœuvre of delay gained time for reflection, and often served to amuse less skilful competitors.

Adolphe Keller was chatting with the famous Palma, the trusted counsellor of the house, who withdrew as Birotteau came in. The perfumer explained his errand; and Adolphe, the more cunning of the two brothers, lynx-natured, keen-eyed, thin-lipped, hard-favoured, listened to him with lowered head, watching the applicant over his spectacles, eyeing him the while with what must be called the banker's gaze, in which there is something of the vulture, something of the attorney; a gaze at once covetous and cold, clear and inscrutable, sombre and ablaze with light.

'Will you be so good as to send me the documents relative to this Madeleine affair,' said he, 'since therein lies the guarantee of the account; they must be examined into before we begin to discuss the case on its merits. If the affair is satisfactory, we might possibly, to avoid encumbering you, be content to take part of the profits instead of discount.'

'Come,' said Birotteau to himself, as he went home again, 'I see his drift. Like the hunted beaver, I must

part with some of my skin. It is better to lose your fleece than to lose your life.'

He went upstairs in high spirits, and his mirth had a genuine ring.

'I am saved,' he told Césarine; 'Keller will open a loan account with me.'

But not until the 29th of December could Birotteau gain admittance a second time to Adolphe Keller's office. On the occasion of his first call, Adolphe was six leagues away from Paris, looking at some property which the great orator had a mind to buy. The next time both the Kellers were closeted together, and could see no one that morning; it was a question of a tender for a loan proposed by the Chambers, and they begged M. Birotteau to return on the following Friday. These delays were heartbreaking to the perfumer; but Friday came at last, and Birotteau sat by the fire in the office, with the daylight falling full on his face, and Adolphe Keller, sitting opposite, was saying, as he held up the notarial deeds, 'These are all right, sir; but what proportion of the purchase-money have you paid?'

'A hundred and forty thousand francs.'

'In money?'

'In bills.'

'Have they been met?'

'They have not fallen due.'

'But suppose that you have given more for the land than it is actually worth (taking it at its present value), where is our guarantee? We should have no security but the good opinion which you inspire and the esteem in which you are held. Business is not based on sentiment. If you had paid two hundred thousand francs, supposing that you have given too much by a hundred thousand francs to get possession of the land, we should in that case have at any rate a guarantee of a hundred thousand francs for the hundred thousand you want to borrow. The result for us would be that we should be

owners of the land in your place, by paying your share; in that case we must know if it is a good piece of business. For if we are to wait five years to double our capital, it would be better to put the money out to interest through the bank. So many things may happen. You want to draw an accommodation bill to meet your bills when they fall due? It is a risky thing to do! You go back to take a leap better. This is not in our way of business.'

For Birotteau, it was as if the executioner had touched his shoulder with the branding-iron. He lost his head.

'Let us see,' said Adolphe, 'my brother takes a warm interest in you; he spoke of you to me. Let us look into your affairs,' he added, and he glanced at the perfumer with the expression of a courtesan pressed for a quarter's rent.

Birotteau became a Molineux, and acted the part of the man at whom he had laughed so loftily. Kept in play by the banker, who took a pleasure in unwinding the skein of the poor man's thoughts, and showed himself as expert in the art of examining a merchant as the elder Popinot was skilled in unloosing a criminal's tongue, César told the story of his business career; he brought the Pâte des Sultanes and the Toilet Lotion upon the scene; he gave a complete account of his dealings with Roguin, and, finally, of the lawsuit with regard to that mortgage from which he had reaped no benefit. He saw Keller's musing smile and jerk of the head from time to time, and said to himself, 'He is giving an ear to me! He is interested; I shall have my loan!' and Adolphe Keller was laughing at Birotteau, as Birotteau himself had laughed at Molineux. Carried away by the impulse of loquacity peculiar to those people on whom misfortune has an intoxicating effect, César showed himself as he really was; he helped the banker to take his measure when he suggested as his final expedient the Cephalic Oil and the firm of Popinot by way of a guarantee.

Led away by a delusive hope, he allowed Adolphe Keller to fathom him and examine into his affairs, until Adolphe Keller saw in the man before him a Royalist blockhead on the brink of bankruptcy. Then, delighted at the prospect of this failure of the deputy-mayor of his arrondissement, of a man whose party was in power, who had been but lately decorated, Adolphe told Birotteau plainly that he could neither open a loan account with him, nor speak on his behalf to the orator brother, the great François. If François were inclined to extend an imbecile generosity to a political adversary, and to come to the aid of a man who held opinions diametrically opposed to his own, he, Adolphe, had no mind that his brother should be a dupe ; he would do all that in him lay to prevent his brother from holding out a helping hand to one of Napoleon's old antagonists, to a man who was wounded at Saint-Roch. Birotteau, exasperated at this, tried to say something about covetousness in the high places of the financial world, of hard-heartedness and sham philanthropy ; but he was overcome with such terrible distress, that he could scarcely stammer out a few words about the institution of the Bank of France, to which the Kellers had recourse.

'But the Bank of France will never make an advance which a private bank declines,' said Adolphe Keller.

'It has always seemed to me,' said Birotteau, 'that the Bank was not fulfilling the purpose for which it was established, when the governors congratulate themselves on a balance-sheet in which they have only lost one or two hundred thousand francs in transactions with the mercantile world of Paris ; it is the province of the Bank to watch over and foster trade.'

Adolphe began to smile, and rose to his feet like a man who is bored.

'If the Bank began to finance all the men in difficulties on 'Change, where rascality congregates in the slipperiest places of the financial world, the Bank would file her

schedule before a year was out. The Bank is hard put to it as it is to guard against accommodation bills and fraudulent letters of exchange, and how would it be possible to examine into the affairs of every one who should be minded to apply for assistance?'

'I want ten thousand francs for to-morrow, Saturday the 30th; and where are they to come from?' Birotteau asked himself, as he crossed the court.

When the 31st is a holiday, payment is due on the 30th, according to custom. César's eyes were so full of tears that, as he reached the great gateway, he scarcely saw a handsome English horse, covered with foam, that pulled up sharply at the gate, and one of the neatest cabriolets to be seen in the streets of Paris. He would fain have been run over by the cabriolet; it would be an accidental death, and the confusion in his affairs would have been set down to the suddenness of the catastrophe. He did not recognise du Tillet's slender figure in faultless morning dress, or see him fling the reins to his servant and put a rug over the back of the thoroughbred.

'What brings *you* here?' asked du Tillet, addressing his old master.

Du Tillet knew quite well why Birotteau had come. The Kellers had made inquiries of Claparon, and Claparon, taking his cue from du Tillet, had blighted the perfumer's old-established business reputation. The tears in the unlucky merchant's eyes told the tale sufficiently plainly, in spite of his sudden effort to keep them back.

'Perhaps you have been asking these Turks to oblige you in some way,' said du Tillet, 'cut-throats of commerce that they are, who have played many a mean trick; they will make a corner in indigo, for instance; they lower rice, forcing holders to sell cheap, so that they can get the game into their own hands and control the market; they are inhuman pirates, who know neither law, nor faith, nor conscience. You cannot know what things

they are capable of doing. They will open a loan account with you if you have some promising bit of business; and as soon as you have gone too far to draw back, they will pull you up and put pressure upon you till you make the whole affair over to them for next to nothing. Pretty stories they could tell you at Havre and Bordeaux and Marseilles about the Kellers! Politics are a cloak that cover a lot of dirty doings, I can tell you! So I make them useful without scruple. Let us take a turn or two, my dear Birotteau.—Joseph, walk the horse up and down, he is overheated, and a thousand crowns is a big investment in horse-flesh.'

He turned towards the Boulevard.

'Now, my dear master (for you used to be my master), is it money that you need? And they have asked you for security, the wretches! Well, for my own part, I know you; and I can offer to give you cash against your bills. I have made my money honourably, and with unheard-of toil. I went in quest of fortune to Germany! At this time of day, I may tell you this—that I bought up the King's debts there for forty per cent. of their value; your guarantee was very useful to me then, and I am grateful. If you want ten thousand francs, they are at your service.'

'What! du Tillet,' cried César, 'do you really mean it? Are you not making game of me? Yes, I am a little pressed for money, just for the moment——'

'I know; Roguin's affair,' returned du Tillet. 'Eh! yes. I myself have been let in there for ten thousand francs, which the old rogue borrowed of me to run away with; but Mme. Roguin will repay the money out of her claims on his estate. I advised her, poor thing, not to be so foolish as to give up her fortune to pay debts contracted for a mistress; it would be very well if she could pay them all, but how is she to make distinctions in favour of this or that creditor, to the prejudice of others? You are no Roguin; I know you,' continued

du Tillet; 'you would rather blow your brains out than cause me to lose a sou. Here we are in the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin; come up and see me.'

It pleased the young upstart to take his old employer, not through the offices, but by way of the private entry, and to walk deliberately, so as to give him a full view of a handsome and luxuriously furnished dining-room, adorned with pictures bought in Germany; through two drawing-rooms, more splendid and elegant than any rooms that Birotteau had yet seen save in the Duc de Lenoncourt's house. The good citizen was dazzled by the gilding, the works of art, the costly knick-knacks, precious vases, and countless little details. All the glories of Constance's rooms paled before this display; and knowing, as he did, the cost of his own extravagance—'Where can he have found all these millions?' said he to himself.

Then they entered a bedroom, which as much surpassed his wife's as the mansion of a great singer at the Opéra surpasses the third-floor dwelling of some supernumerary. The ceiling was covered with violet satin relieved with silken folds of white, and the white fur of an ermine rug beside the bed brought out in contrast all the violet tints of a carpet from the Levant. The furniture and the accessories were novel in form, and exhibited the very refinement of extravagance. Birotteau stopped in front of an exquisite timepiece, with a Cupid and Psyche upon it, a replica of one which had just been made for a celebrated banker. At length master and assistant reached a cabinet, the dainty sanctum of a fashionable dandy, redolent rather of love than of finance. It was Mme. Roguin, doubtless, who, in her gratitude for the care and thought given to her fortune, had bestowed, by way of a thank-offering, the paper-cutter of wrought gold, the carved malachite paper-weights, and all the costly gewgaws of unbridled luxury. The carpet, one of the richest products of the Belgian loom, was as great a

surprise to the eyes as its soft, thick pile to the tread. Du Tillet drew a chair to the fire for the poor dazzled and bewildered perfumer.

'Will you breakfast with me?' He rang the bell; it was answered by a servant, who was better dressed than the visitor.

'Ask M. Legras to come up, and then tell Joseph to return, you will find him at the door of Keller's bank; and you can go to Adolphe Keller's house, and say that instead of seeing him now, I shall wait till he goes on 'Change. Send up breakfast, and be quick about it.'

This talk dazed the perfumer.

'So he, du Tillet, makes that formidable Adolphe Keller come to him at his whistle, as if he were a dog!'

A hop-o'-my-thumb of a page came in and spread a table so slender, that it had escaped Birotteau's notice, setting thereon a Strasbourg pie, a bottle of Bordeaux wine, and various luxuries which did not appear on Birotteau's table twice in a quarter, on high days and holidays. Du Tillet was enjoying himself. His feeling of hatred for the one man who had a right to despise him diffused itself like a warm glow through his veins, till the sight of Birotteau stirred in the depths of his nature the same sensations that the spectacle of a sheep struggling for its life against a tiger might give. A generous thought flashed across him; he asked himself whether he had not carried his vengeance far enough; he hesitated between the counsels of a newly-awakened pity and those of a hate grown drowsy.

'Commercially speaking, I can annihilate the man,' he thought; 'I have power of life and death over him, over his wife, who kept me on the rack, and his daughter, whose hand once seemed to me to grasp a whole fortune. I have his money as it is, so let us be content to let the poor simpleton swim to the end of his tether, which I shall hold.'

But honest folk are wanting in tact; they do what seems good to them without calculating its effect on others, because they themselves are straightforward, and have no after-thoughts. So Birotteau filled up the measure of his own misfortune; he irritated the tiger; all unwittingly he sent a shaft home, and made an implacable enemy of him at a word, by his praise, by giving expression to his honest thoughts, by the sheer lightheartedness which is the gift of a blameless conscience. The cashier came in; and du Tillet said, looking towards César, 'M. Legras, bring me ten thousand francs in cash, and a bill for the amount payable to my order in ninety days by this gentleman, who is M. Birotteau, as you know.'

Du Tillet waited on his guest, and poured out a glass of Bordeaux wine for him; and Birotteau, who thought himself saved, laughed convulsively, fingered his watch-chain, and did not touch the food until his ex-assistant said, 'You do not eat.' In this way he laid bare the depths of the gulf into which du Tillet's hand had plunged him, while the hand which had drawn him out was still stretched over him, and might yet plunge him back again. When the cashier returned, and the bill had been accepted, and César felt the ten bank-notes in his pocket, he could no longer contain his joy. But a moment ago the news that he could not meet his engagements seemed to be about to be published abroad through his Quarter, the Bank must know it, he must confess that he was ruined to his wife; now everything was safe! The joy of his deliverance was as keen as the torture of impending bankruptcy had been. Tears filled the poor man's eyes in spite of himself.

'What can be the matter, my dear master?' asked du Tillet. 'Would you not do to-morrow for me what I am doing to-day for you? Isn't it as simple as saying good-day?'

'Du Tillet,' said the worthy man, with solemn

emphasis, as he rose and took his ex-assistant by the hand, 'I restore you to your old place in my esteem.'

'What! had I forfeited it?' asked du Tillet; and, for all his prosperity, he felt this rude home-thrust, and his colour rose.

'Forfeited . . . not exactly that,' said Birotteau, thunderstruck by his folly; 'people talked about you and Mme. Roguin. The devil! another man's wife . . .'

'You are beating about the bush, old boy,' thought du Tillet, in an old phrase learned in his earlier days.

And even as that thought crossed his mind, he returned to his old design. He would lay this virtue low, he would trample it under foot; all Paris should point the finger of scorn at the honest and honourable man who had caught him, du Tillet, with his hand in the till. Every hatred of every kind, political or private, between woman and woman, or between man and man, dates from some similar detection. There is no cause for hate in compromised interests, in a wound, nor even in a box on the ear; such injuries as these are not irreparable. But to be found out in some base piece of iniquity, to be caught in the act! . . . The duel that ensues between the criminal and the discoverer of the crime cannot but be to the death.

'Oh! Mme. Roguin,' said du Tillet laughingly, 'but isn't that rather a feather in a young man's cap? I understand you, my dear master, they must have told you that she lent me money. Well, on the contrary, it is I who have re-established her finances, which were curiously involved in her husband's affairs. My fortune has been honestly made, as I have just told you. I had nothing, as you know. Young men sometimes find themselves in terrible straits, and in dire need one may strain a point; but if, like the Republic, one has made a forced loan now and again, why, one returns it afterwards, and is as honest as France herself.'

'Just so,' said César. 'My boy — God — Isn't it Voltaire who says—

"He made of repentance the virtue of mortals?"'

'So long as one does not take his neighbour's money in a base and cowardly way,' du Tillet continued, smarting once more under this application of verse; 'as if you, for instance, were to fail before the three months are out, and it would be all up with my ten thousand francs——'

'I fail?' cried Birotteau (he had taken three glasses of wine, and happiness had gone to his head). 'My opinions of bankruptcy are well known. A failure is commercial death. I should die.'

'Long life to you!' said du Tillet.

'To your prosperity!' returned the perfumer. 'Why do you not come to me for your perfumery?'

'Upon my word,' said du Tillet, 'I confess that I am afraid to meet Mme. César, she always made an impression upon me; and if you were not my master, faith, I——'

'Oh! you are not the first who has thought her handsome, and wanted her, but she loves me! Well, du Tillet, my friend, do not do things by halves.'

'What?'

Birotteau explained the affair of the building-land, and du Tillet opened his eyes, complimented César upon his acumen and foresight, and spoke highly of the prospects.

'Oh, well, I am much pleased to have your approbation; you are supposed to have one of the longest heads in the banking line, du Tillet! You can negotiate a loan from the Bank of France for me until the Cephalic Oil has made its way.'

'I can send you to the firm of Nucingen,' answered du Tillet, inwardly vowing that his victim should dance the whole mazy round of bankruptcy. He sat down to

his desk to write the following letter to the Baron de Nucingen :—

'My dear Baron,—The bearer of this letter is M. César Birotteau, deputy-mayor of the second arrondissement, and one of the best known manufacturing perfumers in Paris. He desires to be put in communication with you ; you need not hesitate to do anything that he asks of you, and by obliging him you oblige your friend,

'F. du Tillet.'

Du Tillet put no dot over the *i* in his name. Among his business associates this clerical error was a sign which they all understood, and it was always made of set purpose ; it annulled the heartiest recommendations, the warmest praise and instance in the body of the letter. On receiving such a note as this, where the very exclamation-marks breathed entreaty, in which du Tillet, figuratively speaking, went down on his knees, his associates knew that the writer had been unable to refuse the letter which was to be regarded as null and void. At sight of that undotted *i*, the receiver of the letter forthwith dismissed the applicant with empty compliments and vain promises. Not a few men of considerable reputation in the world are put off like children by this trick ; for men of business, bankers, bill-discounters, and advocates have one and all two methods of signing their names ; one is a dead letter, the other living. The shrewdest are deceived by it. You must have felt the double effect of a cold communication and a warm one to discover the stratagem.

'You are saving me, du Tillet,' said César, as he read the present specimen.

'Oh dear me,' said du Tillet, 'just ask Nucingen for the money, and when he has read my letter he will let you have all that you want. Unluckily, my own capital is locked up at present, or I would not send you to the

prince of bankers, for the Kellers are dwarfs compared with Nucingen. He is a second Law. With my bill of exchange, you will be ready for the 15th, and after that we will see. Nucingen and I are the best friends in the world; he would not disoblige me for a million.'

'It is as good as a guarantee,' said Birotteau to himself, and as he went away his heart thrilled with gratitude for du Tillet. 'Ah, well,' he thought, 'a good deed never loses its reward,' and he fell incontinently to moralising. Yet there was one bitter drop in his cup of happiness. He had, it is true, prevented his wife from looking into the ledgers for several days. Celestin must undertake the book-keeping in addition to his work, with some help from his master; he could have wished his wife and daughter to remain upstairs in possession of the beautiful rooms which he had arranged and furnished for them; but when the first little glow of enjoyment was over, Mme. César would have died sooner than renounce the personal supervision of the details of the business, 'the handle of the frying-pan,' to use her own expression.

Birotteau was at his wits' end; he had done everything that he could think of to conceal the symptoms of his embarrassment from her eyes. Constance had strongly disapproved of sending in the accounts; she had scolded the assistants, and asked Célestin if he meant to ruin the house, believing that the idea was Celestin's own. And Celestin meekly bore the blame by Birotteau's orders. In the assistant's opinion, Mme. César governed the perfumer; and though it is possible to deceive the public, those of the household always know who is the real power in it. The confession was bound to come, and that soon, for du Tillet's loan would appear in the books, and must be accounted for.

As Birotteau came in at the door he saw, not without a shudder, that Constance was at her post, going through

the amounts due to be paid, and doubtless balancing the books.

'How will you pay these to-morrow?' she asked in his ear, when he took his place beside her.

'With money,' he replied, drawing the bank-notes from his pocket, with a sign to Célestin to take them.

'But where do those notes come from?'

'I will tell you the whole story to-night.—Célestin, enter in the bill-book a bill for ten thousand francs due at the end of March, to order of du Tillet.'

'Du Tillet!' echoed Constance, terror-stricken.

'I am just going to Popinot,' said César. 'It is too bad of me; I have not been round to see him yet. Is his oil selling?'

'The three hundred bottles which he brought are all sold out.'

'Birotteau, do not go out again; I have something to say to you,' said Constance. She caught her husband's arm, and drew him to her room in a hurry, which, under any other circumstances, would have been ludicrous.—'Du Tillet!' she exclaimed, when the husband and wife were together, and she had made sure that there was no one but Césarine present; 'Du Tillet robbed us of three thousand francs! And you are doing business with du Tillet! A monster who—who tried to seduce me,' she said in his ear.

'A bit of boyish folly,' said Birotteau, suddenly transformed into a free thinker.

'Listen to me, Birotteau; you are falling out of your old ways; you never go to the factory now. There is something, I can feel it. Tell me about it; I want to know everything.'

'Well, then,' said Birotteau, 'we have nearly been ruined; we were ruined, in fact, this very morning, but everything is set straight again,' and he told the dreadful story of the past two weeks.

'So that was the cause of your illness!' exclaimed Constance.

'Yes, mamma,' cried Césarine. 'Father has been very brave, I am sure. If I were loved as he loves you, I would not wish more. He thought of nothing but your trouble.'

'My dream has come true,' said the poor wife, and pale, haggard, and terror-stricken, she sank down upon the sofa by the fireside. 'I foresaw all this. I told you so that fatal night, in the old room which you have pulled down; we shall have nothing left but our eyes to cry over our losses. Poor Césarine, I——'

'Come, now; so that is what you say!' cried Birotteau. 'I stand in need of courage, and are you damping it!'

'Forgive me, dear,' said Constance, grasping César's hand in hers, with a tender pressure that went to the poor man's heart. 'I was wrong; the misfortune has befallen us, I will be dumb, resigned, and strong to bear it. No, César, you shall never hear a complaint from me.'

She sprang into César's arms, and said, while her tears fell fast, 'Take courage, dear. I should have courage enough for two, if it were needed.'

'There is the Oil, dear wife; the Oil will save us.'

'May God protect us!' cried Constance.

'Will not Anselme come to father's assistance?' asked Césarine.

'I will go to him now,' exclaimed César, his wife's heartbreaking tone had been too much for his feelings; it seemed that he did not know her yet, after nineteen years of married life. 'Do not be afraid, Constance; there is no fear now. Here, read M. du Tillet's letter to M. de Nucingen; he is sure to lend us the money. Between then and now I shall have gained my lawsuit. Besides,' he added (a lying hope to fit the circumstances), 'there is your uncle Pillerault. Courage is all that is wanted.'

'If that were all!' said Constance, smiling.

Birotteau, with the great weight taken off his mind, walked like a man set free from prison; but within himself he felt the indefinable exhaustion consequent on mental exertion which has made heavy demands upon the nervous system, and required more than the daily allowance of will-power; he was conscious of the deficit when a man has drawn, as it were, on the capital of his vitality. Birotteau was growing old already.

Popinot's shop in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants had undergone great changes in the last two months. It had been repainted. The rows of bottles ensconced in the pigeon-hole shelves, touched up with paint, rejoiced the eyes of every merchant who knows the signs of prosperity. The floor of the shop was covered with packing-paper. The warehouse contained certain casks of oil, for which the devoted Gaudissart had procured an agency for Popinot. The books were kept upstairs in the counting-house. An old servant had been installed as housekeeper to Popinot and his three assistants.

Popinot himself, penned in a cash-desk in the corner of the shop screened off by a glass partition, was usually arrayed in a green baize apron and a pair of green-cloth over-sleeves, when he was not buried, as at this moment, in a pile of papers. The post had just come in, and Popinot, with a pen behind his ear, was taking in handfuls of business letters and orders, when at the words, 'Well, my boy?' he raised his head, saw his late employer, locked his cash-desk, and came forward joyously. The tip of the young man's nose was red, for there was no fire in the shop, and the door stood open.

'I began to fear that you were never coming to see me,' he answered respectfully.

The assistants hurried in, eager to see the great man of the perfumery trade, their own master's partner, the deputy-mayor who wore the red ribbon. César was

flattered by this mute homage, and he who had felt so small in the Kellers' bank must needs imitate the Kellers. He stroked his chin, raised himself on tiptoe once or twice with an air, and poured forth his commonplaces.

'Well, my dear fellow, are you up early in the mornings?' asked he.

'No, we don't always go to bed,' said Popinot; 'one must succeed by hook or by crook.'

'Well, what did I tell you? My Oil is a fortune.'

'Yes, sir; but the method of selling it counts for something: I have given your diamond a worthy setting.'

'As a matter of fact,' said the perfumer, 'how are we getting on? Have any profits been made?'

'At the end of a month!' cried Popinot. 'Did you expect it? My friend Gaudissart has not been gone much more than three weeks. He took a post-chaise without telling me about it. Oh! he has thrown himself into this. We shall owe a good deal to my uncle! The newspapers will cost us twelve thousand francs,' he added in Birotteau's ear.

'The newspapers . . .!' cried the deputy-mayor.

'Have you not seen them?'

'No.'

'Then you know nothing of this,' said Popinot. 'Twenty thousand francs in placards, frames, and prints! . . . A hundred thousand bottles paid for! . . . Oh! it is nothing but sacrifice at this moment. We are bringing out the Oil on a large scale. If you had stepped over to the Faubourg, where I have often been at work all night, you would have seen a little contrivance of mine for cracking the nuts, which is not to be sneezed at. For my own part, during the last five days I have made three thousand francs in commission on the druggists' oils.'

'What a good head!' said Birotteau, laying his hand

on little Popinot's hair, and stroking it as if the young man had been a little child, 'I foresaw how it would be.'

Several people came into the shop.

'Good-bye till Sunday; we are going to dine then with your aunt, Mme. Ragon,' said Birotteau, and he left Popinot to his own affairs. Evidently the roast which he had scented was not yet ready to carve.—'How extraordinary it is! An assistant becomes a merchant in twenty-four hours,' he thought, and Birotteau was as much taken aback by Popinot's prosperity and self-possession as by du Tillet's luxurious rooms. 'Here is Anselme drawing himself up a bit when I put my hand on his head, as if he were a François Keller already.'

It did not occur to Birotteau that the assistants were looking on, and that the head of an establishment must preserve his dignity in his own house. Here, as in du Tillet's case, the good man had made a blunder in the kindness of his heart, and the real feeling expressed in that homely familiar way would have mortified any one but Anselme.

The Sunday dinner-party at the Ragons' house was destined to be the last festivity in the nineteen years of César's married life, the life which had been so completely happy. The Ragons lived on the second floor of a quaint and rather stately old house in the Rue du Petit-Bourbon-Saint-Sulpice. Over the panelled walls of their rooms danced eighteenth century shepherdesses in hooped petticoats, amid browsing eighteenth century sheep; and the old people themselves belonged to the bourgeoisie of that bygone eighteenth century, with its solemn gravity, its quaint habits and customs, its respectful attitude to the noblesse, its loyal devotion to Church and King.

The timepieces, the linen, the plates and dishes, all the furniture in fact had such an old-world air, that by very reason of its antiquity it seemed new. The sitting-room, hung with brocatelle damask curtains, contained a

collection of 'duchesse' chairs and what-nots; and from the wall a superb Popinot, Mme. Ragon's father, the alderman of Sancerre, painted by Latour, smiled down upon the room like a parvenu in all his glory. Mme. Ragon at home was incomplete without her tiny King Charles, who reposed with marvellous effect on her hard little *rococo* sofa, a piece of furniture which certainly had never played the part of Crebillon's sofa.

Among the Ragons' many virtues, the possession of old wines arrived at perfect maturity was by no means the least endearing; to say nothing of certain liqueurs of Mme. Anfoux's, brought from the West Indies by the lovely Mme. Ragon's admirers, sufficiently dogged to love on without hope (so it was said). Wherefore the Ragons' little dinners were highly appreciated. Jeannette, the old cook, served the two old folk with a blind devotion; for them she would have stolen fruit to make preserves; and so far from investing her money in the savings-bank, she prudently put it in the lottery, hoping one day to carry home the great prize to her master and mistress. In spite of her sixty years, Jeannette, on Sundays when they had company, superintended the dishes in the kitchen, and waited at table with a deft quickness which would have given hints to Mlle. Contat as Suzanne in the *Marriage of Figaro*.

This time the guests were ten in number—the elder Popinot, Uncle Pillerault, Anselme, César and his wife and daughter, the three Matifats, and the Abbé Loraux. Mme. Matifat, first introduced arrayed for the dance in her turban, now wore a gown of blue velvet, thick cotton stockings, kid slippers, green-fringed chamois leather gloves, and a hat lined with pink, and adorned with blossoming auriculas.

Every one had arrived by five o'clock. The Ragons used to beg their guests to be punctual; and when the good folk themselves were asked out to dinner, their

friends were careful to dine at the same hour, for at the age of seventy the digestion does not take kindly to the new-fangled times and seasons ordained by fashionable society.

Césarine knew that Mme. Ragon would seat Anselme beside her; all women, even devotees, or the feeblest feminine intellects, understand each other in the matter of a love affair. The toilette of the perfumer's daughter was designed to turn young Popinot's head. Constance, who had given up, not without a pang, the idea of the notary, who for her was an heir-presumptive to a throne, had helped Césarine to dress, certain bitter reflections mingling with her thoughts the while. Foreseeing the future, she lowered the modest gauze kerchief somewhat on Césarine's shoulders, so as to display rather more of their outline, as well as the throat on which the young girl's head was set with striking grace. The bodice *à la Grecque*, four or five folds, crossing from left to right, gave short glimpses of delicately rounded contours beneath; and the leaden-grey merino gown, with its flounces trimmed with green ornaments, clearly defined a shape which had never seemed so slender and so lissome. Gold filagree earrings hung from her ears. Her hair, dressed high *à la Chinoise*, was drawn back from her face, so that the delicate freshness of its surface and the dim tracery of the veins which suffused the white velvet with the purest glow of life, was apparent at a glance. Indeed, Césarine was so coquettishly lovely, that Mme. Matifat could not help saying so, without perceiving that the mother and daughter had felt the necessity of bewitching young Popinot.

Neither Birotteau, nor his wife, nor Mme. Matifat, nor any one else, broke in upon the delicious talk between the two young people; love glowed within them as they spoke with lowered voices in the draughty window-seat, where the cold made a miniature north-easter. Moreover, the conversation of their seniors grew

animated when the elder Popinot let something drop concerning Roguin's flight, saying that this was the second notary-defaulter, and that hitherto such a thing had been unknown. Mme. Ragon had touched her brother's foot at the mention of Roguin, Pillerault had spoken aloud to cover the judge's remark, and both looked significantly from him to Mme. Birotteau.

'I know all,' Constance said, and in her gentle voice there was a note of pain.

'Oh, well then,' said Mme. Matifat, addressing herself to Birotteau, who humbly bent his head, 'how much of your money did he run away with? To listen to the gossip, you might be ruined.'

'He had two hundred thousand francs of mine. As for the forty thousand which he pretended to borrow for me from one of his clients whose money he had squandered, we are going to law about it.'

'You will see that settled this coming week,' said the elder Popinot. 'I thought that you would not mind my explaining your position to M. le Président; he has ordered Roguin's papers to be brought into the *Chambre de Conseil*; on examination it will be discovered when the lender's capital was embezzled, and Derville's allegations can be proved or disproved. Derville is pleading in person, to save expense to you.'

'Shall we gain the day?' asked Mme. Birotteau.

'I do not know,' Popinot answered. 'Although I belong to the Chamber before which the case will come, I shall refrain from deliberating upon it, even if I should be called upon to do so.'

'But can there be any doubt about such a straightforward case?' asked Pillerault. 'Ought not the deed to state that the money was actually paid down, and must not the notaries declare that they have seen it handed over? Roguin would go to the galleys if he fell into the hands of justice.'

'In my opinion,' the judge answered, 'the lender

should look to Roguin's caution-money and the amount paid for the practice for his remedy; but sometimes, in still simpler cases than this, the Councillors at the Court-Royal have been divided six against six.'

'What is this, mademoiselle; has M. Roguin run away?' asked Popinot, overhearing at last what was being said. M. César said nothing about it to me—to me who would give my life for him . . .'

Césarine felt that the whole family was included in that 'for him'; for if the girl's inexperience had not understood the tone, she could not mistake the look that wrapped her in a rosy flame.

'I was sure of it; I told him so, but he hid it all from mother, and told his secret to no one but me.'

'You spoke to him of me in this matter,' said Popinot; 'you read my heart, but do you read all that is there?'

'Perhaps.'

'Oh! I am very happy,' said Popinot. 'If you will remove all my fears, in a year's time I shall be so rich that your father will not receive me so badly when I shall speak to him then of our marriage. Five hours of sleep shall be enough for me now of a night . . .'

'Do not make yourself ill,' said Césarine, and no words can reproduce the tones of her voice as she gave Popinot a glance wherein all her thoughts might be read.

'Wife,' said César, as they rose from table, 'I think those young people are in love.'

'Oh, well, so much the better,' said Constance gravely; 'my daughter will be the wife of a man who has a head on his shoulders and plenty of energy. Brains are the best endowment in a marriage.'

She hurried away into Mme. Ragon's room. During dinner, César had let fall several remarks which had drawn a smile from Pillerault and the judge, so plainly did they exhibit the speaker's ignorance; and it was borne in upon the unfortunate woman how little fitted

her husband was to struggle with misfortune. Constance's heart was heavy with unshed tears. Instinctively she mistrusted du Tillet, for all mothers understand *timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* without learning Latin. She wept, and her daughter and Mme. Ragon, with their arms about her, could not learn the cause of her trouble.

'It is the nerves,' said she.

The rest of the evening was spent over the card-table by the old people, and the younger ones played the blithe childish games styled 'innocent amusements,' because they cover the innocent mischief of bourgeois lovers. The Matifats joined the young people.

'César,' said Constance, as they went home again, 'go to M. le Baron de Nucingen some time about the 8th, so as to be sure some days beforehand that you can meet your engagements on the 15th. If there should be any hitch in your arrangements, would you raise a loan one day to pay your debts between one day and the next?'

'I will go, wife,' César answered, and he grasped her hand and Césarine's in his as he added, 'My darlings, I have given you bitter New Year's gifts!' And in the darkness inside the cab the two women, who could not see the poor perfumer, felt hot tears falling on their hands.

'Hope, dear,' said Constance.

'Everything will go well, papa; M. Popinot told me that he would give his life for you.'

'For me—and for my family; that is it, is it not?' answered César, trying to speak gaily.

Césarine pressed her father's hand in a way which told him that Anselme was her betrothed.

Two hundred cards arrived for Birotteau on New Year's Day and the two following days. This influx of tokens of favour and of false friendship is a painful thing for people who are being swept away by the current of misfortune. Three times César presented himself at the

Baron de Nucingen's hôtel, and each time in vain. The New Year's festivities sufficiently excused the banker's absence. But on the last visit Birotteau went as far as the banker's private office, and learned from a German, the head clerk, that M. de Nucingen had only returned from a ball given by the Kellers at five o'clock that morning, and that he would not be visible until half-past nine. Birotteau chatted with this man for nearly half an hour, and contrived to interest the German in his affairs. So, during the day, this cabinet minister of the house of Nucingen wrote to tell César that the Baron would see him at twelve o'clock the following morning, January the 3rd. Although every hour brought its drop of bitterness, that day went by with dreadful swiftness. The perfumer took a cab and drove to the hôtel; the courtyard was already blocked with carriages, and the poor honest man's heart was oppressed by the splendours of that celebrated house.

'Yet he has failed twice,' he said to himself, as he went up the handsome staircase, with flowers on either side, and through the luxuriously furnished rooms by which the Baroness, Delphine de Nucingen, had made a name for herself. The Baroness strove to rival the most splendid houses in the Faubourg Saint-Germain—the houses of a circle into which as yet she had no right of entry.

The Baron and his wife were at breakfast. In spite of the number of those who were waiting in his offices for him, he said that he would see du Tillet's friends at any hour. Birotteau trembled with hope at the change which the Baron's message produced on the lackey's insolent face.

'Bardon me, my tear,' said the Baron, addressing his wife, as he rose to his feet and bowed slightly to Birotteau, 'dees shentleman ees ein goot Royaleest, and de indimate frient of du Dillet. Meinnesir Pirôdôt is teputy-mayor of de Second Arrontussement, and gifs

palls of Asiatic magnificence; you vill make, no doubt, his agquaintance mit bleasure.'

'I should be delighted to take lessons of Mme. Birotteau, for Ferdinand——' ('Come,' thought the perfumer, 'she calls him Ferdinand, plump and plain')—'Ferdinand spoke of the ball to us with an admiration which says the more, because Ferdinand is very critical; everything must have been perfect. Shall you soon give another?' asked Mme. de Nucingen, with a most amiable expression.

'Madame, poor folk like us seldom amuse ourselves,' answered the perfumer, doubtful whether the Baroness was laughing at him, or if her words were simply an empty compliment.

'Meinnesir Crintod suberindended de alderations in your house,' said the Baron.

'Oh! Grindot! is he that nice young architect who has just come back from Rome?' asked Delphine de Nucingen. 'I am quite wild about him; he is making lovely sketches for my album.'

No conspirator in the hands of the executioner in the torture chamber of the Venetian Republic could have felt less at his ease in the boots than Birotteau in his ordinary clothes at that moment. Every word had for him an ironical sound.

'Ve too gif liddle palls here,' the Baron continued, giving the visitor a searching glance. 'Eferypody does it, you see!'

'Will M. Birotteau join us at breakfast?' asked Delphine, and indicated the luxuriously-furnished table.

'I am here on business, Mme. la Baronne, and——'

'Yes!' said the Baron, 'Matame, vill you bermit us to talk pizness?'

Delphine made a little gesture of assent. 'Are you about to buy some perfumery?' she asked of the Baron, who shrugged his shoulders, and turned in despair to César.

'Du Dillet take de greatest inderest in you,' said he.

'At last we are coming to the point,' thought the hapless merchant.

'Mit his ledder, your gretid mit my house is only limited py de pounds of my own fortune . . .'

The life-giving draught which the angel bore to Hagar in the wilderness must surely have been like the dew which these outlandish words effused through Birotteau's veins. The cunning Baron clung of set purpose to the horrible accent of the German Jew, who flatters himself that he has mastered an alien tongue; for this system led to misapprehensions highly useful to him in the way of business.

'And you shall have ein gurrent aggount, dat is how we vill do it,' remarked the good, the great, and venerable financier, with Alsatian geniality.

Birotteau's doubts were all laid to rest; he had had experience of business, and he knew that a man never goes into details unless he is disposed to oblige you and to carry out a plan.

'I neet not say to you that the Pank demands dree zignatures off eferypody, gif de amount is large or small. So you shall make all your pills to de order off our friend du Dillet, who vill send dem de same day to de Pank mit my zignature, and py four o'glock you shall have de amount of de pills dat you haf accept in de morning, and at Pank rate. I do not vant gommission nor discount—nor nossing; for I shall haf de bleasure of peing agreeable to you. . . . But I make one gondition!' he added, touching his nose with the forefinger of his left hand, and putting an indescribable cunning into the gesture.

'It is granted before you ask it, M. le Baron,' said Birotteau, imagining that the banker meant to stipulate for a share in the profits.

'Ein gondition to vich I addach de greatest price,

because I should like Montame de Nichinguenne to take, as she has said, some lessons of Montame Pirôdôt.'

'M. le Baron, do not laugh at me, I beg.'

'Meinnesir Pirôdôt,' said the financier seriously, 'it is an agreement; you are to infite us to your next pall. My wife is chealous; she would like to see your house, of vich eferypody says such great dings.'

'M. le Baron!'

'Oh! if you refuse me, no loan aggount! You are in great favour. Yes! I know dat de Brefect of de Seine was go to you.'

'M. le Baron!'

'You had La Pillartière, ein shentleman-in-ordinary to de King; and de goot Fentéheine, for you were wounded—at Sainte——'

'On the 13th of Vendémiaire, M. le Baron.'

'You had Meinnesir de Lassebette, Meinnesir Fauqueleine of de Agademie——'

'M. le Baron!'

'Eh! *der teufel*, do not be so modest, Meester Teputy-Mayor; I haf heard dat de King said dat your pall——'

'The King?' asked Birotteau, destined to learn no more, for at this moment a young man came into the room; the sound of his footsteps, heard at a distance, had brought a bright colour into Delphine de Nucingen's fair face.

'Goot-tay, my tear de Marsay,' said the Baron. 'Take my blace; dere are a lot of beoples in my office, dey say. Who knows why? De Mines off Wortschinne are baying two hunderd ber cent! Yes. I have receifed de aggounts. You haf a hunderd tousand francs more of ingom dis year, Montame de Nichinguenne; you could buy girdles and kew-kaws to make yourself pretty, as if you neeted dem!'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Birotteau. 'The Ragons have sold their shares!'

'Who may these gentlemen be?' asked the young dandy with a smile.

'Dere!' said Nucingen, who had gone as far as the door already, 'it looks to me as if dose bersons. . . . Te Marsay, dis is Meinnesir Pirôdôt, your berfumer, who gifs palls mit Asiatic magnificence, and has been degoraded py de King——'

De Marsay, taking up his eyeglass, remarked, 'Ah! to be sure. I thought that the face was familiar. Then are you about to perfume your affairs with some efficacious oil, to make them run smoothly?'

'Ach! vell, dose Rakkons had an aggount mit me,' the Baron went on. 'I put dem in de vay of ein fortune, and dey could not vait one more day for it.'

'M. le Baron!' cried Birotteau.

The worthy perfumer found himself very much in the dark about his affairs, and fled after the banker without taking leave of the Baroness or of de Marsay. M. de Nucingen was on the lowest step of the stairs, but even as he reached the door of his office, Birotteau was beside him. As he turned the handle, he saw the despairing gesture of the poor creature, for whom the gulf was yawning, and said—

'Eh! it is understood, is it not? See du Dillet, and arranche it all mit him.'

It occurred to Birotteau that de Marsay might have some influence with the Baron; he darted upstairs with the speed of a swallow, and slipped into the dining-room where, by rights, the Baroness and de Marsay should have been, for he had left Delphine waiting for her coffee and cream. The coffee indeed was now waiting, but the Baroness and the young dandy had vanished; the servant looked amused at Birotteau's astonishment, and there was nothing for it but to go more leisurely downstairs again. From the Nucingens' hôtel he went at once to du Tillet, only to hear that he was at Mme. Roguin's house in the country. He took a cab, and paid an extra fare

to be driven to Nogent-sur-Marne as quickly as if he had travelled post. But at Nogent-sur-Marne the porter told him that *Monsieur and Madame* had set out for Paris, and Birotteau returned quite tired out.

When he told his wife and daughter the story of his excursion, he was amazed to receive the sweetest consolation and assurances that all would go well from Constance, who had always taken all the little ups and downs of business as occasions on which to utter her boding cries.

At seven o'clock the next morning, Birotteau took up his position before du Tillet's door in the dim light. He begged the porter to put him into communication with du Tillet's man, and, by dint of slipping ten francs into the porter's hands, obtained the favour of an interview with du Tillet's man; of him he asked to give him an interview with du Tillet as soon as du Tillet should be visible, and to that end a couple of gold pieces found their way into the possession of du Tillet's man. By way of these little sacrifices and great humiliations, common to courtiers and petitioners, he attained his end. At half-past eight, when his ex-assistant had slipped on a dressing-gown and shaken off the confused ideas of a man awakened from sleep, had yawned, stretched himself, and asked pardon of his old master, Birotteau found himself face to face with the tiger thirsting for revenge, the man whom he was fain to consider as his one friend in the world.

'Do not mind me,' said Birotteau, replying to the apology.

'What do you want, *my good César*?' asked du Tillet; and César, not without terrible palpitations, gave the Baron de Nucingen's answer and demands to an inattentive listener, who looked about for the bellows, and scolded his man-servant for taking so long over lighting the fire.

César did not notice at first that if the master was not

heedful, the man was interested; but seeing this at last, he grew confused and broke off, to begin again, spurred on by a 'Go on, go on; I am listening,' from the abstracted banker.

The good man's shirt was soaked with perspiration, which turned icy cold when du Tillet looked full and steadily at him, and he could see those eyes of silver streaked with a few gold threads; there was a diabolical light in them which pierced him to the heart.

'My dear master, the Bank refused your paper, passed on to Gigonnet *without guarantee* by the firm of Claparon; is that my fault? What! you have been a judge at the Consular Tribunal, how could you make such blunders? I am, before all things, a banker. I will give you my money, but I could not expose my signature to a refusal from the Bank. I live by credit. So do we all. Do you want money?'

'Can you let me have all that I need in cash?'

'That depends upon the amount to be paid. How much do you want?'

'Thirty thousand francs.'

'Plenty of chimney-pots tumbling about my ears!' exclaimed du Tillet, and he burst into a laugh.

The perfumer, misled by the splendour of du Tillet's surroundings, chose to regard that laugh as a sign that the sum was a mere trifle. He breathed again. Du Tillet rang the bell.

'Tell the cashier to come up.'

'He is not here yet, sir,' the servant answered.

'Those rogues are laughing at me! It is half-past eight; they ought to have done a million francs' worth of business by now.'

Five minutes later, M. Legras came upstairs.

'How much have we in the safe?'

'Only twenty thousand francs. Your orders were to buy thirty thousand livres per annum in *rentes*, at present price, payable on the 15th.'

'That is right; I am still asleep.'

The cashier gave Birotteau a sly glance, and went.

'If truth were banished from the earth, she would leave her last word with a cashier,' said du Tillet. 'But have you not an interest in little Popinot's business, now that he has just set up for himself?' he added, after a horrible pause, in which the sweat gathered in drops on Birotteau's forehead.

'Yes,' said César innocently. 'Do you think you could discount his signature for a fair amount?'

'Bring me fifty thousand francs' worth of his acceptances, and I will get them negotiated for you at a reasonable rate by one Gobseck; very easy to do business with when he has plenty of capital on his hands, and he has a good deal just now.'

Birotteau went home again heartbroken. He did not see that bankers and bill-discounters were sending him backwards and forwards in a game of battledore and shuttlecock; but Constance guessed even then that it would be impossible to obtain a loan of any sort. If three bankers had already refused credit to a man as well known as the deputy-mayor, every one would hear of it, and the Bank of France was no longer to be thought of.

'Try to renew' (this was Constance's advice). 'Go to your co-associate, M. Claparon, to every one, in fact, whose bills fall due on the 15th, and ask them to renew. There will be time enough then to go to bill-discounters with Popinot's bills.'

'To-morrow will be the 13th!' exclaimed Birotteau, worn out with anxiety.

He was 'endowed with a sanguine temperament,' to quote his own prospectus; a temperament upon which the wear and tear of emotion and of thought tells so enormously, that sleep is imperatively needed to repair the waste. Cesarine brought her father into the drawing-room, and played *Rousseau's Dream*, that charming

composition of Hérold's, while Constance sat sewing by her husband's side. The poor man lay back on the ottoman couch. Every time his eyes rested on his wife he saw a sweet smile on her lips, and so he fell asleep.

'Poor man!' said Constance. 'What torture is in store for him! . . . If only he can endure it!'

'Oh, mamma, what is it?' asked Césarine, seeing her mother in tears.

'I see bankruptcy ahead, darling. If your father is obliged to file his schedule, there must be no asking for pity of any one. You must be prepared to be an ordinary shop-girl, my dear. If I see you doing your part bravely, I shall have strength to begin life again. I know your father; he will not keep back one farthing; I shall give up my claims, all that we have will be sold. Take your clothes and trinkets to-morrow to Uncle Pillerault; you are not bound to lose anything, my child.'

At these words, spoken with such devout sincerity, Césarine's terror knew no bounds. She thought of going to Anselme, but a feeling of delicacy withheld her.

The next morning found Birotteau in the Rue de Provence at nine o'clock. He had fallen a victim to fresh anxieties of a totally different kind. To borrow money is not necessarily a complicated process in business; it is a matter of daily occurrence, for capital must always be found wherever a new enterprise is started; but to ask a man to renew a bill is in commercial circles what the Police Court is to the Court of Assize; it is a first step to bankruptcy, even as a misdemeanour is half-way to a crime. The secret of your weakness and your embarrassment passes out of your own keeping. A merchant delivers himself up, bound hand and foot, to another merchant, and charity is not a virtue much practised on the Stock Exchange.

The perfumer, who hitherto had walked the streets of Paris with bright confident eyes, now cast down by

doubts, hesitated to go to Claparon; he was beginning to understand that with bankers the heart is merely a portion of the internal economy. Claparon had seemed to him so brutal in his coarse hilarity, and he had felt so much vulgarity in the man, that he shrank from approaching this creditor.

'He is nearer the people, perhaps he will have more soul!' This was the first word of accusation which the anguish of his position wrung from him.

César glanced up at the windows, and at the green curtains yellowed by the sun; then he drew the last of his stock of courage up from the depths of his soul, and climbed the stairs that led to a shabby mezzanine floor. He read the word *office*, engraven in black letters on an oval brass-plate upon the door, and knocked. No one answered, so he went in.

The whole place was something more than humble; it savoured of dire poverty, avarice, or neglect. No clerk showed his face behind a barrier of unpainted deal, surmounted at elbow height by a brass wire lattice, an arrangement which screened off an inner space occupied by tables and desks of blackened wood. Scattered about the deserted offices lay inkstands, in which mould was growing, quill-pens touzled like a street urchin's head, twisted up into suns with rays; the rooms were littered with cardboard cases, papers, and circulars, useless no doubt. The floor of the lobby was as worn, as damp and gritty as the floor of a lodging-house parlour. Through a door on which the word *Counting-house* was inscribed, the visitor entered a second room, where everything was in keeping with the sinister waggery displayed in the first. In one corner stood a large cage of oak with a grill of copper-wire, and a cashier's sliding window. An enormous iron letter-box had doubtless been abandoned to the rats for a playground. The open door of this cage gave a view of yet another of these whimsical offices, and of a shabby and worm-eaten green

chair, a mass of horsehair escaping through a hole underneath this piece of furniture in countless corkscrew curls that called its owner's wig to mind. Evidently this room had been the drawing-room of the house before it had been converted into offices, but the only attempt at ornamental furniture was a round table covered with a green cloth, and some old chairs covered with black leather and adorned with gilt nail-heads which stood about it. The chimney-piece had some pretensions to elegance, the hearthstone was unblackened, and there were no visible signs that a fire had been lighted there. The pier-glass above it, tarnished with fly-spots, had a mean look, so had a mahogany clock-case bought at the sale of some departed notary's office furniture, a dreary object which enhanced the depressing effect of the pair of empty candle-sticks and the all-pervading sticky grime. The dinginess of the paper on the walls, drab with a rose-coloured border, spoke plainly of the habitual presence of smokers and absence of ventilation. The whole stale-looking room resembled nothing so much as a newspaper editor's office. Birotteau, afraid of intruding on the banker's privacy, gave three sharp taps on the door opposite the one by which he had entered.

'Come in!' cried Claparon, and the sound of his voice evidently came from a room beyond. The perfumer could hear a good fire crackling on the hearth, but the banker was not there. This apartment did duty, as a matter of fact, for a private office. François Keller's elegantly furnished sanctum differed from the grotesque neglect of this sham capitalist's surroundings as widely as Versailles differs from the wigwam of a Huron chief; and Birotteau, who had beheld the glories of the banking world, was about to be introduced to its blackguardism.

In a sort of oblong den, contrived behind the private office, where the whole of the furniture, scarcely elegant in its prime, had been battered, broken, covered with grease, slit to rags, soiled and spoiled by the slovenly

habits of the occupier, reclined Claparon, who, at sight of Birotteau, flung on a filthy dressing-gown, laid down his pipe, and drew the bed-curtains with a haste that seemed suspicious even to the innocent perfumer.

'Take a seat, sir,' said du Tillet's banker puppet.

Claparon without his wig, his head tied up in a bandanna handkerchief all awry, was to Birotteau's thinking the more repulsive in that his loose dressing-gown gave glimpses of a nondescript knitted woollen garment, once white, but now a dingy brown, from indefinitely prolonged wear.

'Will you breakfast with me?' asked Claparon, bethinking himself of the ball, and prompted partly by a wish to turn the tables on his host, partly by anxiety to put Birotteau off the scent. And, in point of fact, a round table, hastily cleared of papers, was suspiciously suggestive; for it displayed a pâté, oysters, white wine, and a dish of vulgar kidneys, *sautés au vin de Champagne*, cooling in their gravy, while an omelette with truffles was browning before the sea-coal fire. The table was set for two persons; two table-napkins, soiled at supper on the previous evening, would have enlightened the purest innocence. Claparon, in the character of a man who has a belief in his own adroitness, insisted in spite of Birotteau's refusals.

'I should by rights have had somebody to breakfast, but that somebody has not kept the appointment,' cried the cunning commercial traveller, speaking loud, so that the words might reach the ears of an auditor hiding under the blankets.

'I have come on business pure and simple, sir,' said Birotteau, 'and I shall not detain you long.'

'I am overwhelmed with business,' returned Claparon, pointing to a cylinder desk and to the tables, which were heaped up with papers, 'not a poor little minute may I have to myself. I never see people except on Saturdays; but for you, my dear sir, I am always at home. I have

no time left nowadays for love-affairs or lounging about; I am losing the business instinct, which takes intervals of carefully-timed idleness, if it is to keep its freshness. Nobody sees me busy doing nothing in the boulevards. Pshaw! business bores me, I don't care to hear any more about business at present; I have money enough, and I shall never have pleasure enough. My word, I have a mind to turn tourist and see Italy. Ah! beloved Italy! fair even amid her adversity, adorable land, where, doubtless, I shall find some magnificent, indolent Italian beauty; I have always admired Italian women! Have you ever had an Italian mistress? No? Oh, well, come to Italy with me. We will see Venice, the city of the Doges, fallen, more's the pity, into the hands of those philistines the Austrians, who know nothing of art. Pooh! let us leave business, and canals, and loans, and governments in peace. I am a prince when my pockets are well lined. Let us travel, by Jove!'

'Just one word, sir, and I will go,' said Birotteau. 'You passed my bills on to M. Bidault.'

'Gigonnet, you mean; nice little fellow Gigonnet; a man as easy-going as a—as a slip-knot.'

'Yes,' said César. 'I should be glad—and in this matter I am relying on your integrity and honour—(Claparon bowed)—I should be glad if I could renew——'

'Impossible,' said the banker roundly—'impossible. I am not the only man in the affair. We are all in council, 'tis a regular Chamber; but that we are all on good terms among ourselves, like rashers in a pan. Oh, we deliberate, that we do! The building land by the Madeleine is nothing; we are doing other things elsewhere. Eh! my good sir, if we were not busy in the Champs-Élysées, near the new Exchange which has just been finished, in the Quartier Saint-Lazare and about the Tivoli, we should not be *vinanciers*, as old Nucingen says. So what is the Madeleine? A little

speck of a business. Prrr! we do not dabble, my good sir,' he said, tapping Birotteau's chest, and giving him a hug. 'There, come and have your breakfast, and we will have a talk,' Claparon continued, by way of softening his refusal.

'By all means,' said Birotteau.—'So much the worse for the other,' thought he. He would wait till the wine went to Claparon's head, and find out then who his partners really were in this affair, which began to have a very shady look.

'That is right!—Victoire!' shouted the banker, and at the call appeared a genuine Leonarda, tricked out like a fish-wife.

'Tell the clerks that I cannot see anybody, not even Nucingen, Keller, Gigonnet, and the rest of them!'

'There is no one here but M. Lempereur.'

'He can receive the fashionables,' said Claparon, 'and the small fry need not go beyond the public office. They can be told that I am meditating how to get a pull—at a bottle of champagne.'

To make an old commercial traveller tipsy is to achieve the impossible. César had mistaken his boon companion's symptoms, and thought his boisterous vulgarity was due to intoxication, when he tried to shrive him.

'There is that rascal Roguin still in it with you,' said Birotteau; 'ought you not to write and tell him to help out a friend whom he has left in the lurch, a friend with whom he dined every Sunday, and whom he has known for twenty years?'

'Roguin? A fool; we have his share. Don't be down-hearted, my good friend, it will be all right. Pay on the 15th, and that done, we shall see! I say, "we shall see"—(a glass of wine!)—but the capital is no concern of mine whatever. Oh! if you should not pay at all, *I* should not give you black looks; my share in the affair is limited to a percentage on the purchase-

money, and something down on the completion of the contract, in consideration of which I brought round the vendors. . . . Do you understand? Your associates are good men, so I am not afraid, my dear sir. Business is so divided up nowadays. Every business requires the co-operation of so many specialists! Do you join the rest of us? Then do not dabble in combs and pomade pots—a paltry way of doing business; fleece the public, and go in for the speculation.'

'A speculation?' asked the perfumer; 'what sort of business is it?'

'It is commerce in the abstract,' replied Claparon, 'an affair which will only come to light in ten years' time at the bidding of the great Nucingen, the Napoleon of finance, a scheme by which a man embraces sum-totals, and skims the cream of profits yet to be made; a gigantic conception, a method of marking expectations like timber for annual felling; it is a new cabal, in short. There are but ten or twelve of us as yet, long-headed men, all initiated into the cabalistic secrets of these magnificent combinations.'

César opened his eyes and ears, trying to comprehend these mixed metaphors.

'Listen to me,' Claparon continued, after a pause; 'such strokes as these need capable men. Now, there is the man who has ideas, but has not a penny, like all men with ideas. That sort of man spends and is spent, and cares for nothing. Imagine a pig roaming about a wood for truffles, and a knowing fellow on his tracks; that is the man with the money, who waits till he hears a grunt over a find. When the man with the ideas has hit upon a good notion, the man with the money taps him on the shoulder with a "What is this? You are putting yourself in the furnace-mouth, my good friend; your back is not strong enough to carry this; here are a thousand francs for you, and let *me* put this affair in working order." Good! Then the banker summons

the manufacturers—"Set to work, my friends! Out with your prospectuses! Blarney to the death!" Out come the hunting-horns, and they pipe up with "A hundred thousand francs for five sous!"—or five sous for a hundred thousand francs, gold-mines, coal-mines; all the flourishes and alarums of commerce, in short. Art and science are paid to give their opinion, the affair is paraded about, the public rushes into it, and receives paper for its money, and our takings are in our hands. The pig is safe in his stye with his potatoes, and the rest of them are wallowing in bills of exchange. That is how it is done, my dear sir. Go in for speculation. What do you want to be? A pig or a gull, a clown or a millionaire? Think it over. I have summed up the modern theory of loans for you. Come to see me; you will find a good fellow, always jolly. French joviality, at once grave and gay, does no harm in business, quite the contrary! Men who can drink are made to understand each other. Come! another glass of champagne? It is choice wine, eh? It was sent me by a man at Epernay, for whom I have sold a good deal of it, and at good prices too (I used to be in the wine trade). He shows his gratitude, and remembers me in my prosperity. A rare trait.'

Birotteau, bewildered by this flippancy and careless tone in a man whom everybody credited with such astonishing profundity and breadth, did not dare to question him any further. But in spite of the confusion and excitement induced by unwonted potations of champagne, a name let fall by du Tillet came up in his mind, and he asked for the address of a bill-discounter named Gobseck.

'Is that what you are after, my dear sir?' asked Claparon. 'Gobseck is a bill-discounter in the same sense that the hangman is a doctor. The first thing that he says to you is "Fifty per cent." He belongs to the school of Harpagon; he will supply you with canary

birds, and stuffed boa-constrictors, with furs in summer and nankin in winter. And whose bills are you going to offer him? He will want you to deposit your wife, your daughter, your umbrella, and everything that is yours, down to your hat-box, your clogs (do you wear hinged clogs?), poker and tongs, and the firewood in your cellar, before he will take your bills with your bare name to them! . . . Gobseck! Gobseck! In the name of misfortune, who sent you to the guillotine of commerce?'

'M. du Tillet.'

'Oh! the rogue; just like him. We used to be friends once upon a time; and if the quarrel has gone so far that we do not speak to each other now, I have good reason for disliking him, believe me! He let me see to the bottom of his soul of mud, and he made me uncomfortable at that fine ball you gave. I cannot bear him, with the coxcomb's airs he gives himself, because he has the good graces of a *notaresse*! I could have Marquises myself if I had a mind; he will never have my esteem, I know. Ah! my esteem is a princess who will never take up too much room on his pillow. I say though, old man, you are a funny one to give us a ball, and then come and ask us to renew two months afterwards! You are likely to go far. Let us go into speculation together. You have a character; it would be useful to me. Oh! du Tillet was born to understand Gobseck. Du Tillet will come to a bad end in the Place de Grève. If, as they say, he is one of Gobseck's lambs, he will soon come to the length of his tether. Gobseck squats in a corner of his web like an old spider who has seen the world. Sooner or later, *zut*! and the money-lender sucks in his man like a glass of wine. So much the better! Du Tillet played me a trick—oh! a scurvy trick!'

After an hour and a half spent in listening to meaningless prate, Birotteau determined to go, for the commercial

traveller was preparing to relate the adventure of a representative of the people at Marseille, who had fallen in love with an actress who played the part of *La belle Arsène*. The Royalist pit hissed the lady.

'Up he gets,' said Claparon, and stands bolt upright in his box. '*Arté qui l'a siblée?*' says he; '*eu!* . . . *Si c'est oune femme, je l'amprise; si c'est oune homme, nous se verrons; si c'est ni l'un ni l'autte, que le troun di Diou le cure!*' . . . How do you think the adventure ended?'

'Good day, sir,' said Birotteau.

'You will have to come and see me,' said Claparon at this. 'Cayron's first bill has come back protested, and I am the indorser; I have reimbursed the money, and I shall send it on to you, for business is business.'

Birotteau felt this cool affectation of a readiness to oblige, as he had already felt Keller's hardness and Nucingen's Teutonic banter, in his very heart. The man's familiarity, his grotesque confidences made in the generous glow of champagne, had been like a blight to the perfumer; he felt as if he were leaving some evil haunt in the world financial.

He walked downstairs; he found himself in the streets and went, not knowing whither he went. He followed the Boulevard till he reached the Rue Saint-Denis, then he bethought himself of Molineux, and turned to go towards the Cour Batave. He mounted the same dirty tortuous staircase which he had ascended but lately in the pride of his glory. He remembered Molineux's peevish meanness, and winced at the thought of asking a favour of him. As on the occasion of his previous visit, he found the owner of house property by the fireside, but this time he had eaten his breakfast. Birotteau formulated his demand.

'Renew a bill for twelve hundred francs?' said Molineux, with an incredulous smile. 'You do not mean it, sir. If you have not twelve hundred francs on

the 15th to meet my bill, will you please to send me back my receipt for rent that has not been paid? Ah! I should be angry; I do not use the slightest ceremony in money matters; my rents are my income. If I acted otherwise, how should I pay my way? A man in business will not disapprove of that wholesome rule. Money knows nobody; money has no ears; money has no heart. It is a cold winter, and here is firewood dearer again. If you do not pay on the 15th, you will receive a little summons by noon on the 16th. Pshaw! old Mitral, who serves your processes, acts for me too; he will send you your summons in an envelope, with due regard for your high position.'

'A writ has never been served on me, sir,' said Birotteau.

'Everything must have a beginning,' retorted Molineux.

The perfumer was taken aback by the little old man's frank ferocity; the knell of credit rang in his ears; and every fresh stroke awoke memories of his own sayings as to bankruptcies, prompted by his remorseless jurisprudence. Those opinions of his seemed to be traced in letters of fire on the soft substance of his brain.

'By the by,' Molineux was saying, 'you forgot to write "For value received in rent" across your bills; that might give me a preferential claim.'

'My position forbids me to do anything to the prejudice of my creditors,' said Birotteau, dazed by that glimpse into the gulf before him.

'Good, sir, very good. I thought that I had nothing left to learn in my dealings with messieurs my tenants. You have taught me never to take bills in payment. Oh! I will take the thing into Court, for your answer as good as tells me that you will not meet your engagements. The case touches every landlord in Paris.'

Birotteau went out, sick of life. Feeble and tender

natures lose heart at the first rebuff, just as a first success puts courage into them. César's only hope now lay in little Popinot's devotion; his thoughts naturally turned to him as he passed the Marché des Innocents.

'Poor boy! who would have told me this when I started him six weeks ago at the Tuileries.'

It was nearly four o'clock, the time when the magistrates leave the Palais. As it fell out, the elder Popinot had gone to see his nephew. The examining magistrate, who in moral questions had a kind of second sight which laid bare the secret motives of others, who discerned the underlying significance of the most commonplace actions of daily life, the germs of crime, the roots of a misdemeanour, was watching Birotteau, though Birotteau did not suspect it. Birotteau seemed to be put out by finding the uncle with the nephew; the perfumer's manner was constrained, he was preoccupied and thoughtful. Little Popinot, busy as usual with his pen behind his ear, always fell flat, figuratively speaking, before Césarine's father. César's meaningless remarks to his partner, to the judge's thinking, were merely screens, some important demand was about to be made. Instead of leaving the shop, therefore, the shrewd man of law stayed with his nephew in spite of his nephew, for he thought that César would try to get rid of him by making a move himself. And so it was. When Birotteau had gone, the judge followed, but he noticed César lounging along the Rue des Cinq-Diamants in the direction of the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher. This infinitely small matter bred suspicion in the mind of Popinot the elder, he mistrusted César's intentions, went along the Rue des Lombards, watched the perfumer go back to Anselme's shop, and promptly repaired thither.

'My dear Popinot,' César had begun, 'I have come to ask you to do me a service.'

'What is there to be done?' asked Popinot, with generous eagerness.

'Ah! you give me life!' cried the good man, rejoicing in this warmth from the heart that sent a glow through him after those twenty-five days of glacial cold. 'It is this, to allow me to draw a bill on you on account of my share of the profits; we will settle between ourselves.'

Popinot looked steadily at César; César lowered his eyes. Just at that moment the magistrate reappeared.

'My boy—Oh! I beg your pardon, M. Birotteau—my boy, I forgot to say . . .' and with the imperative gesture learned in the exercise of his profession, the elder Popinot drew his nephew out into the street, and marched him, bareheaded and in shirt-sleeves as he was, in the direction of the Rue des Lombards.

'Your old master will very likely find himself in such straits, that he may be forced to file his schedule, nephew. Before a man comes to that, a man who, may be, has a record of forty years of upright dealing, nay the very best of men, in his anxiety to save his honour, will behave like the most frantic gambler. Men in that predicament will do anything. They will sell their wives and traffic in their daughters; they will bring their best friends into the scrape, and pawn property which is not theirs; they will go to the gaming-table, turn actors—nay, liars; they will shed tears at need. In short, I have known them do the most extraordinary things. You yourself know how good-natured Roguin was, a man who looked as though butter would not melt in his mouth. I do not press these conclusions home in M. Birotteau's case; I believe that he is honest; but if he should ask you to do anything at all irregular, no matter what it is; if he should want you, for instance, to accept accommodation bills, and so start you in a system which, to my way of thinking, is the beginning of all sorts of rascality (for it is counterfeit paper-money), promise me that you will sign nothing without first consulting me. You must remember that if you love his daughter, even for your own sake and hers, you must not spoil your future. If

M. Birotteau must come to grief, what is the use of going with him? What is it but cutting yourselves off from all chance of escape through your business, which will be his refuge?'

'Thank you, uncle; a word to the wise is sufficient,' said Anselme; his uncle's words explained that heart-rending cry from his master.

The merchant who dealt in druggists' oils and sundries looked thoughtful as he entered his dark shop. Birotteau saw the change.

'Will you honour me by coming up to my room? we can talk more at our ease there than here. The assistants, busy as they are, might overhear us.'

Birotteau followed Popinot, a victim to such cruel suspense as the condemned man knows, while he waits for a reprieve or the rejection of his appeal.

'My dear benefactor,' Anselme began, 'you do not doubt my devotion; it is blind. Permit me to ask but one thing, will this sum of money save you once and for all? Or will it merely put off some catastrophe? in which case, what is the use of carrying me with you? You want bills at ninety days. Very well, but I am sure that I myself shall not be able to meet them in three months' time.

Birotteau, white and grave, rose to his feet, and looked into Popinot's face.

Popinot, in alarm, cried, 'I will do it if you wish it.'

'Ungrateful boy!' cried the perfumer, gathering all his strength to hurl at Anselme the words which should brand him as infamous.

Birotteau walked to the door and went. Popinot, recovering from the sensation which the terrible words had produced in him, darted downstairs and rushed into the street, but saw no sign of the perfumer. The dreadful words of doom rang in the ears of Césarine's lover, poor César's face of anguish was always before his eyes; he lived, indeed, like Hamlet, haunted by a ghastly spectre.

Birotteau staggered along the streets like a drunken man. He found himself at last on the Quai, and followed its course to Sèvres, where he spent the night in an inn, stupefied with sorrow; and his frightened wife dared not make any inquiries for him. Under such circumstances, it is fatal to give the alarm rashly. Constance wisely immolated her anxiety to her husband's business reputation; she sat up all night for him, mingling prayers with her fears. Was César dead? Had he left Paris in the pursuit of some last hope? When morning came, she behaved as though she knew the cause of his absence; but when at five o'clock César had not returned, she sent word to her uncle and begged him to go to the Morgue. All through that day the brave woman sat at her desk, her daughter doing her embroidery by her side, and, neither sad nor smiling, both confronted the public with quiet faces.

When Pillerault came, he brought César with him; he had met his niece's husband after 'Change in the Palais Royal, hesitating to enter a gaming-house. That day was the 14th.

César could eat nothing at dinner. His stomach, too violently contracted, rejected food. It was a miserable meal; but it was not so bad as the evening that came after it. For the hundredth time, the merchant experienced one of the hideous alternations of despair and hope which wear out weak natures, when the soul passes through the whole scale of sensations, from the highest pitch of joy to the lowest depths of despair. Derville, the consulting barrister, rushed into the splendid drawing-room. Mme. César had done everything in her power to keep her poor husband there; he had wanted to sleep in the attic, 'so as not to see the monuments of my folly,' he said.

'We have gained the day,' cried Derville.

At those words the lines in César's face were smoothed out, but his joy alarmed Pillerault and Derville. The

two frightened women went away to cry in Césarine's room.

'Now I can borrow on the property!' exclaimed the perfumer.

'It would not be wise to do so,' said Derville; 'they have given notice of appeal, the Court-Royal may reverse the decision, but we shall know in a month's time.'

'A month!'

César sank into a lethargy, from which no one attempted to rouse him. This species of intermittent catalepsy, during which the body lives and suffers while the action of the mind is suspended, this fortuitous respite from mental anguish, was regarded as a godsend by Constance, Césarine, Pillerault, and Derville—and they were right. In this way Birotteau was able to recover from the wear and tear of the night's emotions. He lay in a low chair by the fireside; over against him sat his wife, who watched him closely, with a sweet smile on her lips—one of those smiles which prove that women are nearer to the angels than men, in that they can blend infinite tenderness with the most sincere compassion, a secret known only to the angels whose presence is revealed to us in the dreams providentially scattered at long intervals in the course of human life. Césarine, sitting on a footstool at her mother's feet, now and again bent her head over her father's hands and brushed them lightly with her hair, as if by this caress she would fain communicate through the sense of touch the thoughts which at such a time are importunate when rendered by articulate speech.

Pillerault, that philosopher prepared for every emergency, sat in his arm-chair, like the statue of the Chancellor of the Hôpital in the peristyle of the Chamber of Deputies, wearing the same look of intelligence which is stamped on the features of an Egyptian sphinx, and talked in a low voice with Derville. Constance had recommended that the lawyer, whose discretion was

above suspicion, should be consulted. With the schedule already drafted in her mind, she laid the situation before Derville; and after an hour's consultation or thereabouts, held in the presence of the dozing perfumer, Derville looked at Pillerault and shook his head.

'Madame,' said he, with the pitiless coolness of a man of business, 'you must file your petition. Suppose that by some means or other you should contrive to meet your bills to-morrow, you must eventually pay at least three thousand francs before you can borrow on the whole of your landed property. To your liabilities, amounting to five hundred and fifty thousand francs, you oppose assets consisting of a very valuable and very promising piece of property which cannot be realised—you must give up in a given time, and it is better, in my opinion, to jump from the window than to roll down the stairs.'

'I am of that opinion, too, my child,' said Pillerault.

Mme. César and Pillerault both went to the door with Derville.

'Poor father!' said Césarine, rising softly to put a kiss on César's forehead.—'Then could Anselme do nothing?' she asked, when her mother and uncle came in again.

'The ungrateful boy!' cried César. The name had touched the one sensitive spot in his memory, like the string of a piano resonant to the stroke of the hammer.

Little Popinot, meanwhile, since those words had been hurled at him like an anathema, had not had a moment's peace nor a wink of sleep. The hapless youth called down maledictions on his uncle, and went in search of him. To induce experience and legal acumen to capitulate, young Popinot poured forth all a lover's eloquence, hoping to work on the feelings of a judge, but his words slid over the man of law like water over oilcloth.

'Commercial usage,' pleaded Anselme, 'permits a sleeping partner to draw to a certain extent upon his

co-associate on account of profits; and in our partnership we ought to put it in practice. After looking into my business all round, I feel sure that I am good to pay forty thousand francs in three months' time. M. César's honesty permits me to feel confident that he will use the forty thousand francs to meet his bills. So, if he fails, the creditors will have no reason to complain of this action on our part. And besides, uncle, I would rather lose forty thousand francs than give up Césarine. At this moment, while I am speaking, she will have heard of my refusal, and I shall be lowered in her eyes. I said that I would give my life for my benefactor! I am in the case of the young sailor who must go to the bottom with his captain, or the soldier who is bound to perish with his general.'

'A good heart and a bad man of business; you will not be lowered in *my* eyes,' said the judge, grasping his nephew's hand. 'I have thought a good deal about this,' he continued; 'I know that you love Cesarine to distraction; I think that you can obey the laws of your heart without breaking the laws of commerce.'

'Oh! uncle, if you have found out a way, you will save my honour.'

'Lend Birotteau fifty thousand francs on his proprietary interest in your Oil; it has become, as it were, a piece of property; I will draw up the document for you.'

Anselme embraced his uncle, went home, made out bills for fifty thousand francs, and ran all the way from the Rue des Cinq-Diamants to the Place Vendôme; so that at the very moment when Césarine, her mother, and Pillerault were gazing at the perfumer, amazed by the sepulchral tone in which the words 'Ungrateful boy!' were uttered in answer to the girl's question, the drawing-room door opened, and Popinot appeared.

'My dearly beloved master,' he said, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, 'here is the thing for which you asked me.'

He held out the bills.

'Yes. I have thought carefully over my position; I shall meet them, never fear! Save your honour!'

'I was quite sure of him,' cried Césarine, grasping Popinot's hand convulsively.

Mme. César embraced Popinot. The perfumer rose out of his chair, like the righteous at the sound of the last trump; he too was issuing from a tomb. Then with frenzied eagerness he clutched the fifty stamped papers.

'One moment!' cried the stern Uncle Pillerault, snatching up Popinot's bills. 'One moment!'

The four persons composing this family group—César and his wife, Césarine and Popinot—bewildered by their uncle's interposition, and by the tone in which he spoke, looked on in terror while he tore the bills to pieces and flung them into the fire, where they blazed up before any one of them could stop him.

'Uncle!'

'Uncle!'

'Uncle!'

'Sir!'

There were four voices, and four hearts in one, a formidable unanimity. Uncle Pillerault put an arm round little Popinot, held him tightly to his heart, and put a kiss on his forehead.

'You deserve to be adored by any one who has a heart at all,' said he. 'If you loved my daughter, and she had a million, and you had nothing but *that*' (he pointed to the blackened scraps of paper), 'you should marry her in a fortnight if she loved you. Your master,' indicating César, 'is mad.—Now, nephew,' Pillerault began gravely, addressing the perfumer, 'no more illusions! Business must be carried on with hard coin, and not with sentiments. This is sublime, but it is useless. I have been on 'Change for a couple of hours. No one will give you credit for two farthings; every-

body is talking about your disaster; everybody knows that you could not get renewals, that you went to more than one banker, and that they would have nothing to say to you, and all your other follies; it is known that you climbed six pair of stairs to ask a landlord who chatters like a jackdaw to renew a bill for twelve hundred francs; everybody says that you gave a ball to hide your embarrassment. . . . They will say directly that you had no money deposited with Roguin. Roguin is a blind, according to your enemies. One of my friends, commissioned to report everything, has brought confirmation of my suspicions. Every one expects that you will try to put Popinot's bills on the market; in fact, you set him up on purpose to tide you over your difficulties. In short, all the gossip and slander usually set in motion by any man who tries to mount a step in the social scale is going the round of business circles at this moment. You would spend a week in hawking Popinot's bills from place to place, you would meet with humiliating refusals, and nobody would have anything to do with them. There is nothing to show how many of them you are issuing, and people look to see you sacrificing this poor boy to save yourself. You would ruin Popinot's credit in pure waste. Do you know how much the most sanguine bill-discounter would give you for your fifty thousand francs? Twenty thousand; *twenty thousand*, do you understand? There are times in business when you must contrive to hold out for three days without food, as if you had the indigestion, and the fourth brings admission to the pantry of credit. You cannot hold out for the three days, and therein lies the whole position. Take heart, my poor nephew, you must file your schedule. Here is Popinot, and here am I; as soon as your assistants have gone to bed we will set to work to spare you the misery of it.'

'Uncle! . . .' cried the perfumer, clasping his hands.

'César, do you really mean to arrive at a fraudulent bankruptcy with assets *nil*? Your interest in Popinot's business saves your honour.'

This last fatal light thrown on his position made it clear to César; he saw the full extent of the hideous truth; he sank down into his low chair, and then on to his knees; his mind wandered, he became a child again. His wife thought the shock had killed him, and knelt to raise him, but she clung close to him when she saw him clasp his hands and raise his eyes; and in spite of the presence of his uncle, his daughter, and Popinot, he began with remorseful resignation to repeat the sublime prayer of the Church on earth—

'Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. *Give us this day our daily bread.* And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.'

Tears filled Pillerault's stoical eyes, and Césarine stood, white and rigid as marble, with her tear-stained face hidden on Anselme's shoulder. Then the old merchant took the young man's arm, 'Let us go downstairs,' he said.

At half-past eleven they left César in the care of his wife and daughter. Just at that moment Célestin, who had looked after the business during this storm, came upstairs and opened the drawing-room door. Césarine heard his footsteps, and hurried forward to place herself so as to screen the prostrate master of the house.

'Among this evening's letters,' he said, 'there was one from Tours, the direction was not clear, it has been delayed. I thought it might be from the master's brother, so I did not open it.'

'Father,' cried Césarine, 'there is a letter from uncle at Tours.'

'Ah! I am saved!' exclaimed César. 'My brother!

my brother!' and he kissed the letter, which ran thus:—

François Birotteau to César Birotteau.

'Tours, *17th.*

'My beloved Brother,—Your letter has given me the keenest distress; and so when I had read it, I offered up to God on your behalf the holy sacrifice of the mass, praying Him, by the blood shed for us by our Divine Redeemer, to look mercifully upon you in your affliction. And now that I have put up my prayer *pro meo fratre Cæsare*, my eyes are filled with tears to think that by misfortune I am separated from you at a time when you must need the support of a brother's affection. But then I bethought me that the worthy and venerated M. Pillerault will doubtless fill my place. My dear César, in the midst of your troubles, do not forget that this life of ours is a life of trial and a transition state; that one day we shall be rewarded if we have suffered for the holy name of God, for His holy Church, for putting in practice the doctrines of the Gospel, or for leading a virtuous life; if it were not so, the things of this present world would be unintelligible. I repeat these words, though I know how good and pious you are, because it may happen to those who, like you, are tossed by the tempests of this world, and launched upon the perilous seas of human concerns, to be led to blaspheme in their distresses, distracted as they are by pain. Do not curse the men who will wound you, nor God, who mingles bitterness with your life at His will. Look not on the earth, but rather keep your eyes lifted to Heaven; thence comes comfort for the weak, the riches of the poor are there, and the fears of the rich . . .'

'Oh, Birotteau,' interrupted his wife, 'just miss that out, and see if he is sending us anything.'

'We will often read it over,' said her husband, drying

his eyes. He opened the letter, and a draft on the Treasury fell out. 'I was quite sure of him, poor brother,' said Birotteau, picking up the draft.

'. . . I went to see Mme. de Listomère,' he continued, reading in a voice choked with tears, 'and without giving a reason for my request, I begged her to lend me all that she could spare, so as to swell the amount of my savings. Her generosity enables me to make up the sum of a thousand francs, which I send you in the form of a draft by the Receiver-General of Tours upon the Treasury.'

'A handsome advance!' said Constance, looking at Césarine.

'By retrenching some superfluities in my way of living, I shall be able to repay Mme. de Listomère the money I have borrowed of her in three years' time; so do not trouble about it, my dear César. I am sending you all that I have in the world, with the wish that the sum may assist you to bring your difficulties to a happy termination; doubtless they are but momentary. I know your delicacy, and wish to anticipate your scruples. Do not dream of paying any interest on the amount, nor of returning it in the day of prosperity, which will dawn for you before long, if God deigns to grant the petitions which I make daily for you. After your last letter, received two years ago, I thought that you were rich, and that I might give my savings to the poor; but now all that I have belongs to you. When you have weathered this passing squall, keep the money for my niece Césarine, so that when she is established in life she may spend it on some trifle which will remind her of an old uncle, whose hands are always raised to Heaven to implore God's blessing upon her, and for all those who shall be dear to her. Bear in mind, in fact, dear César, that I am a poor priest, living by the grace of God, as

the wild-birds live in the fields, walking quietly in my own path, striving to keep the commandments of our divine Saviour, and consequently needing but little. So do not have the least hesitation in your difficult position, and think of me as one who loves you tenderly. Our excellent Abbé Chapeloud (to whom I have not said a word about your strait) knows that I am writing to you, and wishes me to send the most kindly messages to all your family, with wishes for your continued prosperity. May God vouchsafe to preserve you and your wife and daughter in good health; and I pray for patience to you all, and courage in the day of adversity.

'François Birotteau.

'Priest of the Cathedral Church of Tours, and Vicar of the Parish Church of Saint-Gatien.'

'A thousand francs!' cried Mme. Birotteau, in vehement anger.

'Lock it up,' César said gravely; 'it is all he has. Besides, it belongs to our Césarine, and should enable us to live without asking anything of our creditors.'

'And then they will believe that you have taken away large sums.'

'I shall show them his letter.'

'They will say that it is a fraud.'

'*Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*' cried César, appalled at this; 'I have often thought that very thing of poor folk who, no doubt, were just in my position.'

Mother and daughter were both too anxious about César to leave him, and they sewed on by his side. There was a deep silence. At two o'clock in the morning the drawing-room door was softly opened, and Popinot beckoned to Mme. César to come downstairs. At the sight of his niece, Uncle Pillerault took off his spectacles.

'There is hope yet, my child,' he said; 'all is not

over; but your husband could not stand the strain of the ups and downs of this business, so Popinot and I will try to arrange it. Do not leave the shop to-morrow, and take down the names of all the holders of the bills; we have all the day till four o'clock. This is my idea. There is nothing to fear from M. Ragon or from me. Suppose now that Roguin had paid over to the vendors the hundred thousand francs you deposited with him—in that case, you would no more have them than you have them to-day. You have to meet bills to the amount of a hundred and forty thousand francs, payable to Claparon's order; you must pay them anyhow, so it is not Roguin's bankruptcy which is ruining you. Now, to meet your liabilities, I see forty thousand francs to be borrowed sooner or later on your factory, and sixty thousand francs in Popinot's bills. So you may struggle through; for once through, you can raise money on that building-land by the Madeleine. If your principal creditor agrees to help you, I shall not consider my fortune; I will sell my *rentes*; I shall be without bread; Popinot will be between life and death; and, as for you, you will be at the mercy of the smallest events. But the Oil will give a good return, no doubt. Popinot and I have been consulting together; we will support you in this struggle. Oh, I will eat my dry bread gaily, if success dawns on the horizon. But everything depends on Gigonnet and on Claparon and his associates. We are going to see Gigonnet between seven and eight, Popinot and I, and then we shall know what to make of their intentions.'

Constance, carried away by her feelings, put her arms about her uncle, and could not speak for tears and sobs. Neither Popinot nor Pillerault could know that Bidault, *alias* Gigonnet, and Claparon were but two of du Tillet's doubles, and that du Tillet had set his heart upon reading this terrible paragraph in the *Gazette*:—

'Decree of the Tribunal of Commerce. M. César Birotteau, wholesale perfumer, of 397 Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, declared a bankrupt, date provisionally fixed, 16th of January 1819. Registrar: M. Gobenheim-Keller. Agent: M. Molineux.'

Anselme and Pillerault studied César's affairs till daylight came, and at eight o'clock that morning the two heroic comrades, the old veteran and the subaltern of yesterday, neither of whom was destined to experience on his own account the dreadful agony of mind endured by those who go up and down the stairs of Bidault, otherwise Gigonnet, betook themselves without a word to the Rue Grenétat. It was a painful time for both of them. More than once Pillerault passed his hand over his forehead.

In the Rue Grenétat multifarious small trades are carried on in every overcrowded house. Every building has a repulsive aspect. The hideousness of these houses has a distinct quality of its own, in which the mean squalor of a poor industrial neighbourhood predominates.

Old Gigonnet inhabited the third floor in one of these houses. All the windows, with their dirty square panes of glass, were secured to the frames by pivots, and tilted to admit the air; you walked straight up the staircase from the street, and the porter lived in the box on the mezzanine floor lighted from the staircase. Every one in the house, except Gigonnet, plied some handicraft; workmen came and went all day long. Every step on the stairs, where filth was allowed to accumulate, was plastered over with a coating of mud, hard or soft, according to the state of the weather. Each landing on this fetid stair displayed the name of some craftsman painted in gilt letters on a sheet of iron, which was painted red and varnished, and some sample of the man's achievements in his trade. The doors, for the most part, stood ajar, affording glimpses of grotesque com-

binations of industry and domestic life; the sounds which issued thence, snatches of song, yells, whistlings, and uncouth growls recalled the noises heard at the Jardin des Plantes towards four o'clock. The smartest braces for the trade in the *article Paris* were being made in a loathsome den on the first floor; on the second, among heaps of the most unsavoury litter, the manufacture of the daintiest cardboard boxes, displayed at the New Year in shop windows, was carried on. Gigonnet, who was worth eighteen hundred thousand francs, lived and died on the third floor in this house. Nothing would induce him to leave it, although his niece, Mme. Saillard, offered him rooms in a mansion in the Place Royale.

'Courage!' said Pillerault, as he jerked the cord of the lever bell-pull that hung by Gigonnet's neat grey-painted door.

Gigonnet himself opened it, and the perfumer's two champions in the lists of bankruptcy went through a formal, chilly-looking room, with curtainless windows, and entered a second, where all three seated themselves.

The bill-discounter took up his position before a grate full of ashes, in which the wood maintained a stubborn resistance to the flames. The sight of his green cardboard cases, and the monastic austerity of the office, windy as a cave, sent a cold chill through Popinot. His dazed eyes wandered over the pattern of the cheap wall-paper—tricolour flowers on a bluish background—which had been hung some five-and-twenty years back; and turned from that depressing sight to the ornaments on the chimney-piece, a lyre-shaped clock and oval vases, blue Sèvres ware, handsomely mounted in gilt copper. This bit of flotsam, recovered by Gigonnet from the wreck of Versailles, when the palace was sacked by the populace, came from a queen's boudoir, but the magnificent-looking ornaments were flanked by a couple of wrought-iron candlesticks of the commonest descrip-

tion, a harsh contrast which continually reminded the beholder of the manner in which their owner had come by those royal splendours.

'I know that you cannot come on your own account,' said Gigonnet, 'but for the great Birotteau. Well, what is it, my friends?'

'I know that you have nothing to learn, so we will be brief,' said Pillerault. 'Have you his bills payable to Claparon?'

'Yes.'

'Will you exchange the first fifty thousand francs that will fall due for bills accepted by M. Popinot here, less the discount, of course?'

'Gigonnet lifted the terrible green cap, which seemed to have been born with him, and displayed a bald butter-coloured pate, then with a Voltairean grin—

'You want to pay me in oil for hair,' he remarked, 'and what should I do with it?'

'When you joke, it is time for us to take ourselves off,' said Pillerault.

'You speak like the sensible man that you are,' said Gigonnet, with a flattering smile.

'Very well, and how if I back M. Popinot's bills?' asked Pillerault, making a final effort.

'You are as good as gold ingots, M. Pillerault; but I have no use for gold ingots, all that I want is current coin.'

Pillerault and Popinot took their leave and went. Even at the foot of the staircase Popinot's knees still shook under him.

'Is he a man?' he asked of Pillerault.

'People say so,' answered the older man. 'Keep this little interview always in mind, Anselme! You have seen what money-lending is, stripped of its masquerade and palaver. Some unforeseen event turns the screw upon us, and we are the grapes, and bill-discounters the barrels. This speculation in building-land is a good

piece of business no doubt; Gigonnet, or somebody behind him, has a mind to cut César's throat and to step into his shoes. That is all; there is no help for it now. And this is what comes of borrowing money; never resort to it.'

It had been a dreadful morning for Mme. Birotteau. For the first time she had taken the addresses of those who came for money, and had sent away the Bank collector without paying him; yet the brave woman was glad to spare her husband these humiliations. Towards eleven o'clock she saw Pillerault and Anselme returning; she had been expecting them with ever-increasing anxiety, and now she read her doom in their faces. There was no help for it, the schedule must be filed.

'He will die of grief,' said the poor wife.

'I could wish that he might,' said Pillerault gravely; 'but he is so devout, that as things stand his director the Abbé Loraux alone can save him.'

Pillerault, Popinot, and Constance remained below, while one of the assistants went for the Abbé Loraux. The Abbé should prepare Birotteau for the schedule which Célestin was copying out fair for his master's signature. The assistants were in despair; they loved their employer. At four o'clock the good priest came. Constance told him all the details of the calamity which had befallen them, and the Abbé went upstairs like a soldier mounting to the breach.

'I know why you have come,' César exclaimed.

'My son,' said the priest, 'your sentiments of submission to the Divine will have long been known to me, now you are called upon to put them in practice. Keep your eyes fixed ever upon the Cross, contemplate the Cross without ceasing, and think of the cup of humiliation of which the Saviour of men was compelled to drink, think of the anguish of His Passion, and thus you may endure the mortifications sent to you by God——'

'My brother the Abbé has already prepared me,' said

César, holding out the letter, which he read over again, to his confessor.

'You have a good brother,' said M. Loraux, 'a virtuous and sweet-natured wife, and a loving daughter, two real friends in your uncle and dear Anselme, two indulgent creditors in the Ragons. All these kind hearts will pour balm into your wounds continually, and will help you to carry your cross. Promise me to bear yourself with a martyr's courage, and to take the blow without wincing.'

The Abbé coughed, a signal to Pillerault in the next room.

'My submission is unlimited,' said César calmly. 'Disgrace has come upon me; I ought only to think of making reparation.'

Césarine and the priest were both surprised by poor Birotteau's tone and look. And yet nothing was more natural. Every man bears a definitely known misfortune better than suspense and constant alternations of excessive joy at one moment, followed on the next by the last extremity of anguish.

'I have been dreaming for twenty-two years,' he said, 'and to-day I wake to find myself staff in hand again.' César had once more become the Tourangeau peasant.

At these words Pillerault held his nephew tightly in his arms. César looked up and saw his wife and Célestin, the latter with significant documents in his hands; then he glanced calmly round the group; all the eyes that met his were sad but friendly.

'One moment!' he said, and unfastening his Cross of the Legion of Honour, which he gave to the Abbé Loraux, 'you will give that back to me when I can wear it without a blush.—Célestin,' he continued, turning to his assistant, 'send in my resignation; I am no longer deputy-mayor. M. l'Abbé will dictate the letter to you, date it January 14th, and send Raguet with it to M. de la Billardière.'

Célestin and the Abbé Loraux went downstairs. For nearly a quarter of an hour perfect silence prevailed in César's study. Such firmness took the family by surprise. Célestin and the Abbé came back again, and César signed the letter of resignation; but when Pillerault laid the schedule before him, poor Birotteau could not repress a dreadful nervous tremor.

'Oh, God! have mercy upon us!' he said, as he signed the terrible instrument and handed it to Célestin.

Then Anselme Popinot spoke, and a gleam of light crossed his clouded brow. 'Monsieur and madame,' he said, 'will you grant me the honour of mademoiselle's hand?'

This speech brought tears into the eyes of all who heard it; César alone rose to his feet, took Anselme's hand, and said in a hollow voice, but with dry eyes, 'My boy, you shall never marry a bankrupt's daughter.'

Anselme looked Birotteau steadily in the face.

'Will you promise, sir, in the presence of your whole family, to consent to our marriage, if mademoiselle will take me for her husband, on the day when you shall have paid all your creditors in full?'

There was a moment's pause. Every one felt the influence of the emotion recorded in the perfumer's weary face.

'Yes,' he said at last.

Anselme stretched out his hand to Césarine with an indescribable gesture; she gave him hers, and he kissed it.

'Do you also consent?' he asked her.

'Yes,' she said.

'So I am really one of the family. I have a right to interest myself in your affairs,' was his comment, with an enigmatical look.

Anselme hurried away lest he should betray a joy in too great contrast with his master's trouble. Anselme was not exactly delighted with the bankruptcy; but so absolute, so egoistical is love, that Césarine herself in her

inmost heart felt a glow of happiness strangely at variance with her bitter distress of mind.

'While we are about it, let us strike every blow at once,' said Pillerault, and in Constance's ear.

An involuntary gesture, a sign not of assent, but of sorrow, was Mme. Birotteau's answer.

'What do you mean to do, nephew?' said Pillerault, turning to César.

'To continue the business.'

'I am not of that opinion,' said Pillerault. 'Go into liquidation, let your assets go to your creditors in the shape of dividend, and go out of business altogether. I have often thought what I should do if I were placed in a similar position. (Oh! you must be prepared for everything! The merchant who does not contemplate possible insolvency is like a general who does not lay his account with a defeat; he is only half a merchant.) I myself should never have gone on again. What! Be compelled to blush before men whom I should have wronged, to endure their suspicious looks and unspoken reproaches? I can think of the guillotine—in one instant all is over; but to carry a head on your shoulders to have it cut off daily, is a kind of torture from which I should escape. Plenty of men begin again as though nothing had happened; so much the better for them!—they are braver than Claude-Joseph Pillerault. If you pay your way (and pay ready-money you must), people will say that you managed to save something for yourself; and if you have not a halfpenny, you will never recover. 'Tis good evening to you. Surrender your assets, let them sell you up, and do something else.'

'But what?' asked César.

'Eh! try for a place under the Government,' said Pillerault; 'you have influence, have you not? There are the Duc and Duchesse de Lenoncourt, Mme. de Mortsauf, M. de Vandenesse! Write to them, go to

see them, they will find you some post in the Household, with a thousand crowns or so hanging to it; your wife will earn as much again; your daughter, perhaps, may do the same. The case is not desperate. You three among you will earn something like ten thousand francs a year. In ten years' time, you will be in a position to pay a hundred thousand francs, for you will have no expenses meanwhile; your womankind shall have fifteen hundred francs from me; and, as for you, we shall see.'

It was Constance, and not César, who pondered these wise words, and Pillerault went on 'Change. At that time stockbrokers used to congregate in a provisional structure of planks and scaffolding, a large circular room, with an entrance in the Rue Feydeau. The perfumer's failure was already known, and had created a sensation in high commercial circles, for their prevailing politics were Constitutional at that time. Birotteau was a conspicuous personage, and envied by many. Merchants, on the other hand, who leaned towards Liberalism, regarded Birotteau's too celebrated ball as an audacious attempt to trade on their sentiments, for the Opposition were fain to monopolise patriotism. Royalists were allowed to love the King, but the love of their country was the exclusive privilege of the Left, the Left was for the people; and those in power had no right to rejoice thus vicariously through the administration, in a national event which the Liberals meant to exploit for their own benefit. For which reasons the fall of a Ministerialist in favour at Court, of an incorrigible Royalist who had insulted Liberty by fighting against the glorious French Revolution on Vendémiaire 13th, set all tongues wagging on 'Change, and was received with applause.

Pillerault wanted to know what was being said, and to study public opinion. He went up to one of the most eager groups; du Tillet, Gobenheim-Keller, Nucingen, old Guillaume and his son-in-law Joseph Lebas, Claparon, Gigonnet, Mongenod, Camusot, Gobseck,

Adolphe Keller, Palma, Chiffreville, Matifat, Grindot, and Lourdois were discussing the news.

'Well, well, how careful one had need to be!' said Gobenheim, addressing du Tillet; 'my brothers-in-law all but opened an account with Birotteau, it was a near thing.'

'I am let in for ten thousand francs myself,' said du Tillet; 'he came to me a fortnight ago, and I let him have the money on his bare signature. But he obliged me once, and I shall lose it without regret.'

'Your nephew is like the rest,' said Lourdois, addressing Pillerault. 'Gave entertainments. I can imagine that a rogue might try to throw dust in your eyes to induce confidence; but how could a man who passed for the cream of honest folk descend to the stale mountebank's trickery that never fails to catch us?'

'Like leeches,' commented Gobseck.

'Only trust a man if he lives in a den like Claparon,' said Gigonnet.

'Vell,' said the stout Baron Nucingen, for du Tillet's benefit, 'you haf dried to blay me a nice drick, sending Pirôdôt to me. I do not know,' he went on, turning to Gobenheim the manufacturer, 'why he did not send rount to me for vifty tousend vrancs; I should haf led him haf dem.'

'Oh! not you, M. le Baron,' said Joseph Lebas. 'You must have known quite well that the Bank had refused his paper; you were on the Discount Committee which declined it. This poor man, for whom I still feel a very great respect, fails under singular circumstances——'

Pillerault grasped Joseph Lebas's hand.

'It is, in fact, impossible to explain how the thing has happened,' said Mongenod, 'except by the theory that there is some one behind Gigonnet, some banker whose intention it is to spoil the Madeleine speculation.'

'The thing which has happened to him always happens to people who go out of their own line,' said Claparon,

interrupting Mongenod. 'If he had brought out his Cephalic Oil himself, instead of sending up the price of building lots in Paris by rushing into land speculation, he would have lost his hundred thousand francs through Roguin, but he would not have gone bankrupt. He will start afresh under the name of Popinot.'

'Keep an eye on Popinot,' said Gigonnet.

According to this crowd of merchants, Roguin was 'poor Roguin'; the perfumer was 'that unlucky Birotteau.' A great passion seemed to excuse the one, the other appeared the more to blame on account of his pretensions. Gigonnet left the Exchange, and took the Rue Perrin-Gasselin on his way home to the Rue Grenétat. He looked in on Mme. Madou, the dry-fruit saleswoman.

'Well, old lady,' said he, with his cruel good-humour, 'and how are we getting on in our way of business?'

'Middling,' said Mme. Madou respectfully, and she offered the money-lender her only armchair with a friendly officiousness which she had never shown to any one else but the dear departed.

Mother Madou, who would fell a carman with a blow if he were refractory or carried a joke too far, who had not feared to assist at the storming of the Tuileries on the 10th of October, who railed at her best customers (for that matter, she was capable of heading a deputation of the Dames de la Halle, and speaking to the King himself without a tremor)—Angélique Madou received Gigonnet with the utmost respect. She was helpless in his presence; she winced under his hard eyes. It will be a long while yet before the executioner ceases to be a terror to the people, and Gigonnet was the executioner of the small traders. The man who sets money in circulation is more looked up to in the Great Market than any other power; all other human institutions are as nought compared with him. For them the Commissaire is Justice personified, and with the Commissaire

they of the Market become familiar. But the sight of the money-lender entrenched behind his green cardboard cases, of the usurer whom they implore with fear in their hearts, dries up the sources of wit, parches the throat, and abashes the bold eyes; the people grow respectful in his presence.

'Have you come to ask something of me?' said she.

'A mere trifle; be prepared to refund the amount of Birotteau's bills, the old man has gone bankrupt, so all outstanding claims must be sent in; I shall send you in a statement to-morrow.'

The pupils of Mme. Madou's eyes first contracted like the eyes of a cat, then flames leapt forth from them.

'O the beggar! O the scamp! and he came here himself to tell me that he was deputy-mayor, piling on his lies! The Lord ha' mercy! That's just the way with business; there is no trusting mayors nowadays; the Government cheats us! You wait, I will have the money out of them, I will——'

'Eh! every one comes out of this sort of thing the best way he can, my little dear!' said Gigonnet, lifting one leg with the precise little gesture of a cat picking its way among puddles, a trick to which he owed his nickname.[1] Some swells have been let in who mean to get themselves out of the scrape——'

'Good! good! I will get my hazel-nuts out.—Marie Jeanne! my clogs and my lamb's-wool shawl. Quick! or I will lend you a clout that will warm your cheeks.'

'That will make it hot for them yonder up the street,' said Gigonnet to himself, as he rubbed his hands. 'Du Tillet will be satisfied; there will be a scandal in the Quarter. What that poor devil of a perfumer can have done to him, I don't know; for my own part, I am as sorry for the man as for a dog with a broken paw. He isn't a man; he has no fight in him.'

Mme. Madou broke out like an insurrection in the

[1] Gigonnet, from *Gigotter*, to kick the legs about.

Faubourg Saint-Antoine towards seven o'clock that evening, and swept to the luckless Birotteau's door, which she opened with unnecessary violence, for her walk had had an exciting effect.

'Brood of vermin, I must have my money, I want my money! You give me my money! or I will have sachets and satin gimcracks and fans till I have the worth of my two thousand francs! A mayor robbing the people! Did any one ever see the like! If you don't pay me, I will send him to jail; I will go for the public prosecutor; I will put the whole posse of them on his tracks! I do not stir from here without my money, in fact.'

She looked as if she would open the glass door of a cupboard in which expensive goods were kept.

'The Madou is helping herself,' said Célestin, speaking in a low voice to his neighbour. The lady overheard the remark, for during a paroxysm of rage the senses are either deadened, or preternaturally alert, according to the temperament. She bestowed on Célestin the most vigorous box on the ear ever given and received in a perfumer's shop.

'Learn to respect women, my cherub,' quoth she, 'and not to bedraggle the names of the people you rob.'

Mme. Birotteau came forward from the back shop. Her husband by chance was also there; in spite of Pillerault, he chose to remain, carrying his humility and obedience to the law so far as to be ready to submit to be put in prison. 'Madame,' said Constance, 'for Heaven's sake, do not bring a crowd together in the street.'

'Eh! let them come in,' cried the saleswoman; 'I will tell them about it; it will make them laugh! Yes, my goods and the francs I made by the sweat of my brow go for you to give balls. You go dressed like a queen of France, forsooth, and fleece poor lambs like me for the wool! *Jésus!* stolen goods would burn *my* shoulders, I

know! I have nothing but shoddy on my carcase, but it is my own! Bandits and thieves! my money, or——'

She pounced upon a pretty inlaid case full of costly perfumery.

'Leave it alone, madame,' said César, appearing on the scene; 'nothing here belongs to me, it is all the property of my creditors. I have nothing left but myself; and if you have a mind to seize me and put me in jail, I give you my word of honour' (a tear overflowed his eyes at this) 'that I will wait here for your process-server, police-officer, and bailiff's men.'

From his tone and gesture, he evidently meant to do as he said; Mme. Madou's anger died down.

'A notary has absconded with my money, and the disasters which I cause come through no fault of mine,' César went on; 'but in time you shall be paid, if I have to work myself to death and earn the money by my hands as a market-porter.'

'Come, you are a good man,' said the market woman. 'Excuse my speaking, madame; but I shall have to fling myself into the river, for Gigonnet will be down upon me, and I have nothing but bills at ten months to give for your cursed paper.'

'Come round and see me to-morrow morning,' said Pillerault, coming forward; 'I will arrange the business for you at five per cent. with a friend of mine.'

'*Quien!* that is good Father Pillerault!—Why, yes, he is your uncle,' she went on, turning to Constance. 'Come, now, you are honest folk; I shall not lose anything, shall I?—Good-bye till to-morrow, old Brutus,' she added, for the benefit of the retired ironmonger.

César insisted on remaining amid the ruins of his glory, and would hear of no other course; he said that by so doing he could explain his position to all his creditors. In this determination, Uncle Pillerault upheld César in spite of the entreaties of his niece. César was persuaded

to go upstairs, and then the wily old man hurried to M. Haudry, put César's case before him, obtained a prescription for a sleeping-draught, had it made up, and went back to spend the evening in his nephew's house. With Césarine's assistance, he constrained César to drink as they did; the narcotic did its work; and fourteen hours later Birotteau awoke to find himself in Pillerault's own bedroom in the Rue des Bourdonnais, a prisoner in the house of his uncle, who slept on a camp bedstead put up in the sitting-room.

When Pillerault had put César into the cab, and Constance had heard it roll away, then her courage failed her. Our strength is often called forth by the necessity of sustaining some one weaker than ourselves; and the poor woman, now that she was left alone with her daughter, wept as she would have wept for César if he had been lying dead.

'Mamma,' said Césarine, seating herself on her mother's knee, with the gracious kitten-like ways that women only display for each other, 'you said that if I bore my part bravely, you would be able to face adversity. So do not cry, mother dear. I am ready to work in a shop; I will forget what we have been; I will be a forewoman, as you were when you were a girl; you shall never hear a regret or a complaint from me. And I have a hope. Did you not hear M. Popinot?'

'Dear boy! he shall not be my son-in-law.'

'Oh! mamma——'

'He will be my own son.'

'There is this one good thing about trouble, it teaches us to know our real friends,' said Césarine; and, changing places with her mother, she at last comforted her, and soothed the poor woman's grief.

The next morning Constance left a note for the Duc de Lenoncourt, one of the first Gentlemen of the Bedchamber. She asked for an interview at a certain hour. Meanwhile, she went to M. de la Billardière, told him of

the predicament in which César found himself in consequence of Roguin's flight from the country, and begged the mayor to give her his support with the Duke, and to speak for her, for she feared that she might express herself ill. She wanted some post for Birotteau. Birotteau would be the most honest of cashiers, if there are degrees in the quality of honesty.

'The King has just appointed the Comte de Fontaine as Comptroller-General of the Royal Household; there is no time to be lost.'

At two o'clock La Billardière and Mme. César ascended the great staircase of the Hôtel de Lenoncourt in the Rue Saint-Dominique, and were brought into the presence of one of the nobles highest in the King's favour, in so far as Louis XVIII. could be said to have preferences. The gracious reception accorded to her by a great noble, one of the little group who formed a connecting link between the eighteenth-century noblesse and those of the nineteenth, put hope into Mme. César. The perfumer's wife was great and simple in her sorrow; sorrow ennobles the most commonplace natures, for it has a grandeur of its own, but only those who are true and sincere can take its polish. Constance was essentially sincere. It was a question of prompt application to the King.

In the midst of the discussion, M. de Vandenesse was announced.

'Here is your deliverer,' exclaimed the Duke.

Mme. Birotteau was not unknown to the young man, who had been once or twice to the perfumer's shop for those trifles which are often of as much importance as great things. The Duke explained La Billardière's views; and when Vandenesse learned the disasters, he went immediately with La Billardière to see the Comte de Fontaine on behalf of the Marquise d'Uxelles' godson. Mme. Birotteau was asked to await the result.

M. le Comte de Fontaine, like La Billardière, was one

of the provincial noblesse, the almost unknown heroes of La Vendée. Birotteau was no stranger to him, for he had seen the perfumer at the *Queen of Roses* in former days. At that time, those who had shed their blood for the Royalist cause enjoyed privileges, which the King kept secret for fear of hurting Liberal susceptibilities, and M. de Fontaine, one of the King's favourites, was supposed to be in the confidence of Louis XVIII. Not only did this influential person definitely promise to obtain a post for the perfumer, but he went to the Duc de Lenoncourt, then in attendance, to ask him for a moment's speech with the King that evening, and to entreat for La Billardière an audience with Monsieur the King's brother, who had a particular regard for the old Vendean.

That very evening M. le Comte de Fontaine came from the Tuileries to inform Mme. Birotteau that as soon as her husband had received his discharge, he would be appointed to a post worth two thousand five hundred francs per annum in the Sinking Fund Department, all places in the Household being at that time filled with noble supernumeraries to whom the Royalist family were bound.

This success was but a part of the task undertaken by Mme. Birotteau. The poor woman went to Joseph Lebas at the sign of the *Cat and Racket* in the Rue Saint-Denis. On the way thither she met Mme. Roguin in her showy carriage, doubtless on a shopping expedition. Their eyes met, and the visible confusion on the beautiful face of the notary's wife, at this meeting with the woman who had been brought to ruin, gave Constance courage.

'Never will I drive in a carriage paid for with other people's money,' said she to herself.

Welcomed by Joseph Lebas, she asked him to look for a situation for her daughter in some respectable house of business. Lebas made no promises, but a week later it

was arranged that Césarine should be placed in a branch of one of the largest drapery establishments in Paris, which had just been opened in the Quartier des Italiens. She was to live in the house, and to take charge of the shop and counting-house, with a salary of three thousand francs. She would represent the master and mistress, and the forewoman was to act under her orders.

As for Mme. César herself, she went on the same day to ask Popinot to allow her to take charge of the books, the correspondence, and the household. Popinot knew well that this was the one commercial house in which the perfumer's wife might take a subordinate position and still receive the respect due to her. The noble-hearted boy installed her in his house, gave her a salary of three thousand francs, arranged to give his own room to her, and went up into the attic. And so it came to pass that the beautiful woman, after one short month spent amid novel splendours, was compelled to take up her abode in the poor room where Gaudissart, Anselme, and Finot had inaugurated the Cephalic Oil.

The Tribunal of Commerce had appointed Molineux as agent, and he came to take formal possession of César's property. Constance, with Célestin's help, went through the inventory with him; and then mother and daughter went to stay with Pillerault. They went out on foot, and simply dressed, and without turning their heads, and this was their leave-taking of the house in which they had spent the third part of a lifetime. Silently they walked to the Rue des Bourdonnais, and dined with César, for the first time since their separation. It was a melancholy dinner. They had each had time to think over the position, to weigh the burden laid upon them, to estimate their courage. All three were like sailors, prepared to face the coming tempest without blinking the danger. Birotteau took heart again when he heard that great personages had interested themselves for him and provided for his future; but he broke down

when he heard of the arrangement which had been made for his daughter. Then hearing how bravely his wife had begun to work again, he held out his hand to her.

Tears filled Pillerault's eyes for the last time in his life at the sight of this pathetic picture of the father, mother, and daughter united in one embrace; while Birotteau, the most helpless and downcast of the three, held up his hand and cried, 'We must hope!'

'To save expense, you must live here with me; you shall have my room, and share my bread. For a long time past I have been tired of living alone; you will take the place of that poor boy I lost. And it will only be a step from here to your office in the Rue d'Oratoire.'

'Merciful God!' cried Birotteau. 'There is a star to guide me when the storm is at its height.'

By resignation to his fate, the victim of a misfortune consumes his misfortune. Birotteau could fall no further; he had accepted the position, he became strong again.

In France when a merchant has filed his petition, the only thing he need trouble himself to do is to retreat to some oasis at home or abroad where he may passively exist like the child that he is in the eye of the law; theoretically he is a minor, and incapable of acting in any capacity as a citizen.[1] Practically, however, he is by no means a nullity. He does not, indeed, show his face until he receives a 'certificate of immunity from arrest' (which no registrar nor creditor has been known to refuse), for if he is found at large without it he is liable to be put in prison; but once provided with his safe-conduct, his flag of truce, he can take a stroll through the enemy's camp, not from idle curiosity, but to counteract and thwart the evil intentions of the law with regard to bankrupts.

[1] In France a bankrupt loses his civil and political status; he recovers the right of administering his own affairs after his discharge; but the disabilities are only removed by Rehabilitation. This is an order granted by the Court when it is proved that the bankrupt has paid debts and costs in full.

A prodigious development of perverse ingenuity is the direct result of any law which touches private interests. The one thought of a bankrupt, as of everybody else who finds his purposes crossed in any way by the law of the land, is how to evade it. The period of civil death, during which time a bankrupt must be considered as a kind of commercial chrysalis, lasts for three months or thereabouts, the interval required for the formalities which must be gone through before creditors and debtor sign a treaty of peace, otherwise known as a *concordat*, a word which indicates sufficiently clearly that concord reigns after the storm raised by the clashing of various interests which run counter to one another.

Directly the schedule is deposited, the Tribunal of Commerce appoints a registrar to watch over the interests of the throng of unascertained creditors on the one hand, and on the other to protect the bankrupt from the vexatious importunities and inroads of infuriated creditors, a double part which presents magnificent possibilities if registrars had but time to develop them. The registrar authorises an agent by procuration, to take formal possession of the bankrupt's property, bills, and effects, and the agent checks the statement of assets in the schedule; lastly, the clerk of the court convenes a meeting of creditors, by tuck of drum, that is to say, by advertisements in the newspapers. The creditors, genuine or otherwise, are called upon to assemble and agree among themselves to appoint provisional trustees, who shall replace the agent, step into the bankrupt's shoes, and, by a legal fiction, become indeed the bankrupt himself. These have power to realise everything, to make compromises, or to sell outright; in short, to wind up the whole business for the benefit of the creditors, provided that the bankrupt makes no opposition. As a rule, in Paris the bankruptcy is not carried beyond the stage of the provisional trustees, and for the following reasons:—

The nomination of trustees is a proceeding calculated to stir up more angry feeling than any other resolution which can be passed by an assembly of men, deluded, baffled, befooled, ensnared, bamboozled, robbed, cheated, and thirsting for vengeance; and albeit, as a general thing, the creditor is cheated, robbed, bamboozled, ensnared, befooled, baffled, and deluded, in Paris no commercial crisis, no feeling, however high, can last for three mortal months. Nothing in commerce but a bill of exchange is capable of starting up clamorous for payment at the expiration of ninety days. Before the three months are out, all the creditors, exhausted by the wear and tear, and worn out by the marches and countermarches of the liquidation, sleep soundly by the side of their excellent little wives. These facts may enable those who are not Frenchmen to understand how it comes to pass that the appointment of provisional trustees is usually final; out of a thousand provisional trustees, there are not five who are appointed to carry the thing further. The reasons of the swift abjuration of commercial enmity which has its source in a failure may be imagined; but for those who have not the good fortune to be merchants, some explanation of the drama known as a bankruptcy is necessary if they are to comprehend how it constitutes the most monstrous legal farce in Paris, and understand the ordinary rule to which César's case was to be so marked an exception.

A failure in business is a thrilling drama in three distinct acts. Act the first may be called The Agent; act the second, The Trustees; and act the third, The *Concordat*, or payment of composition. The spectacle is twofold, as is the case with plays performed on the stage; for there is the spectacular effect intended for the public, and the more or less invisible mechanism by which the effects are produced, and the same play if seen before and behind the scenes looks quite different from different points of view. In the wings stand the bankrupt and

his attorney (one of the advocates who practise at the Tribunal of Commerce), and the trustees and agent and the registrar complete the list.

Nobody outside Paris knows what no Parisian can fail to know, that a registrar is the most extraordinary kind of magistrate which the freaks of civilisation have devised. In the first place, he is a judge who, at every moment of his official life, may go in fear that his own measure may be dealt to him again. Paris has even seen the President of her Tribunal of Commerce compelled to file his petition ; and the ordinary judge, who is called upon to act as a registrar, is no venerable merchant retired from business, whose magistracy is a tribute to a stainless career ; but the active senior partner of some great house, a man burdened with the responsibility of vast enterprises. It is a *sine qua non* that a judge who is bound to give decisions on the torrents of commercial disputes which pour incessantly upon the capital shall have as much, or more, business of his own than he can manage.

Thus the Tribunal of Commerce, which might have been a useful transition stage and half-way house between the trading community and the regions of the *noblesse*, is composed of busy merchants, who may one day be made to suffer for unpopular awards, and a Birotteau among them may find a du Tillet.

The judge or registrar, therefore, is of necessity a personage in whose presence a great deal is said to which perforce he lends an ear, thinking the while of his private concerns. He is very apt to leave public business in the hands of the trustees and the attorneys who practise at the Tribunal of Commerce, unless some odd and unusual case turns up ; some instance of theft under curious circumstances, to draw from him the remark that either the creditor or the debtor must be a clever fellow. This personage, set on high above the scene, like the portrait of a king in an audience-chamber, is to be seen of a morning from five to seven o'clock in his yard if he is

a timber merchant; in his shop, if, like Birotteau, he is a perfumer; and again, in the evening at dessert after dinner, but always and in any case terribly busy. For these reasons this functionary is usually dumb.

Let us do justice to the law; the registrar's hands are tied by the hasty legislation which provided for these matters; and many a time he sanctions frauds which he is powerless to hinder, as will shortly be seen.

The agent, instead of being the creditors' man, may play into the debtor's hands. Each creditor hopes to swell his share, and in some way to make better terms for himself with the bankrupt, whom every one suspects of a secret hoard. The agent can make something out of both sides, by dealing leniently with the bankrupt on the one hand, or on the other by securing something for the more influential creditors, and in this way can hold with the hare and run with the hounds. Not unfrequently a crafty agent has annulled a judgment by buying out the creditors and releasing the merchant, who springs up again at a rebound like an indiarubber ball.

The agent turns to the best furnished crib; he will, if necessary, cover the largest creditors and let the debtor go bare, or he will sacrifice the creditors to the merchant's future, as suits him best. So the whole drama turns on the first act; and the agent, like the attorney of the Tribunal, is the utility-man in a piece in which neither will play unless he is sure of his fees beforehand. In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, the agent is for the debtor.

At the time when this story took place, it was the practice of attorneys at the Tribunal of Commerce to go to the judge who was to act as registrar and nominate a man of their own, some one who knew something of the debtor's affairs and could manage to reconcile the interests of the many and of the one—the honourable trader who had fallen into misfortune. Of late years it has been the practice of shrewd judges to

wait till this has been done so as to avoid the nominee, and to make an effort to appoint a man of passable integrity.

During this first act the creditors, genuine or presumed, present themselves to select the provisional trustees, an appointment which, as has been said, is practically final. In this electoral assembly every creditor has a voice, whether his claim is for fifty sous or fifty thousand francs, and the votes are reckoned by count and not by weight. The names of the trustees are proposed at the meeting, packed by the debtor with sham creditors (the only ones who never fail to put in an appearance); and from the names thus sent in, the registrar, the powerless president, is *bound* to choose those who shall act. Naturally, therefore, the registrar takes the trustees from the debtor's hands, another abuse which turns this catastrophe into one of the most burlesque dramas sanctioned by a court of justice. The 'honourable trader fallen into misfortune' is master of the situation, and proceeds to carry out a premeditated robbery with the law at his back. In Paris, as a rule, the petty tradesmen are blameless. Before a shopkeeper files his schedule, the poor honest fellow has left no stone unturned; he has sold his wife's shawl, and pawned his spoons and forks; and when he gives in at last, it is with empty hands, he is utterly ruined, and has not even money to pay the attorney, who troubles himself very little about his client.

The law demands that the *concordat*, which remits a part of the debt and restores the debtor to the management of his affairs, should be put to the vote and carried by a sufficient majority, with due regard to the amounts claimed by the voters. To secure the majority is a great feat which demands the most skilful diplomacy on the part of the debtor, his attorney, and the trustees amid the clash of conflicting interests. The ordinary commonplace stratagem consists in offering to such a

body of the creditors as will represent the majority required by the law, a premium to be paid over and above the dividend which the meeting of creditors is to consent to accept. For this gigantic swindle there is no remedy. Successive Tribunals of Commerce, familiar with it by dint of practice in non-official capacity, and grown wise by experience, have decided of late that all claims are made void where there is a suspicion of fraud; thus it is to the debtor's interest to complain of the 'extortion,' and the judges of the Tribunal hope in this way to raise the moral tone of proceedings in liquidation. But they will only succeed in making matters worse; creditors will exercise their ingenuity to invent still more rascally devices which the judges will brand as registrars, and profit by as merchants.

Another extremely popular expedient, which gave rise to the expression 'serious and legitimate creditor,' consists in creating creditors, much as du Tillet created a firm of bankers. By introducing a sufficient number of Claparons into the meeting, the debtor, in these diverse manifestations, receives a share of the spoils, and sensibly diminishes the dividends of the real creditors. This plan has a double advantage. The debtor obtains resources for the future, and at the same time secures the proper number of votes representing (to all appearance) a sufficient proportion of the claims upon the estate, the majority necessary for his discharge. These 'gay bogus creditors' are like sham electors in the electoral college. What help has the 'serious *bonâ-fide* creditor' against his 'gay, bogus' compeer? He can rid himself of him by attacking him! Very good. But if the 'serious and *bonâ-fide*' creditor means to oust the intruder, he must leave his own business to take care of itself, and he must employ an attorney; and as the said attorney makes little or nothing out of the case, he prefers to 'conduct' bankruptcies, and does not take a bit of pettifogging business too seriously. Then, at the outset, before the

'gay and bogus' one can be unearthed, a labyrinth of procedure must be entered upon, the bankrupt's books must be gone through to some remote epoch, and application must be made to the Court to require that the books of the pretended creditor shall be likewise produced; the improbability of the fiction must be set forth and clearly proved to the satisfaction of the judges of the Tribunal, and the serious creditor must come and go and plead and arouse interest in the indifferent. This Quixotic performance, moreover, must be gone through afresh in each separate case; and each gay and bogus creditor, if fairly convicted of 'gaiety,' makes his bow to the court with an 'Excuse me, there is some mistake; I am very serious indeed.' All this is done without prejudice to the rights of the debtor, who may appeal and bring Don Quixote into the Court-Royal. And in the meantime Don Quixote's own affairs go askew, and he too may be compelled to file his schedule.

Moral: Let the debtor choose his trustees, verify the claims, and arrange the amount of composition himself.

Given these conditions, who cannot imagine the underhand schemes, the tricks worthy of Sganarelle, stratagems that a Frontin might have devised, the lies that would do credit to a Mascarille, the empty wallets of a Scapin, and all the results of these two systems? Any bankruptcy since insolvency came into fashion would supply a writer with material sufficient to fill the fourteen volumes of *Clarissa Harlowe*. A single example shall suffice.

The illustrious Gobseck, the master at whose feet the Palmas, Gigonnets, Werbrusts, Kellers, and Nucingens of Paris have sat, once found himself among the creditors of a bankrupt who had managed to swindle him, and whom, on that account, he proposed to handle roughly. Of this person he received bills to fall due *after the discharge* for a sum which (taken together with the dividends received at the time) should pay the amount owing

to him (Gobseck) in full. Gobseck, in consequence, recommended that a final dividend of twenty-five per cent. be paid. Behold the creditors swindled for Gobseck's benefit! But the merchant had signed the illegal bills in the name of the insolvent firm; and when the time came, a dividend of twenty-five per cent. was all that he could be made to pay upon them, and Gobseck, the great Gobseck, received a bare fifty per cent. He always took off his hat with ironical respect when he met that debtor.

As all transactions which take place within ten days before the time when a man files his schedule are open to question, certain prudent prospective bankrupts are careful to break ground early, and to approach some of their creditors, whose interest it is, not less than their own, to arrive at a prompt settlement. Then the more astute creditors will go in search of the simple or of the very busy, paint the failure in the darkest colours, and finally buy up their claims for half their value. When the estate is liquidated, these shrewd folk come by the dividend on their own share, and make fifty, thirty, or twenty-five per cent. on the liabilities which they have purchased, and in this way contrive to lose nothing.

After the failure is declared, the house in which a few bags of money yet remain from the pillage is more or less hermetically sealed. Happy the merchant who can effect an entrance by the window, the roof, the cellar, or a hole in the wall, and secure a bag to swell his share! When things have come to this pass, this Beresina, where the cry of 'Each for himself' has been raised, it is hard to say what is illegal or legal, false or true, honest or dishonest. A creditor is thought a clever fellow if he 'covers himself'; that is to say, if he secures himself at the expense of the rest. All France once rang with discussion of a prodigious failure, which took place in a certain city where there was a Court-Royal; the magistrates therein being all personally interested in the case,

arrayed their shoulders in waterproof cloaks so heavy, that the mantle of justice was worn into holes, on which grounds it was necessary to transfer the affair into another court. There was no registrar, no agent, no final judgment possible in the bankrupt's own district.

In Paris these commercial quicksands are so thoroughly well appreciated, that every merchant, however much time he may have on his hands, accepts the loss as an uninsured accident; and, unless he is involved for some very large sum, passes the matter to the wrong side of his profit and loss account. He is not so foolish as to waste time over wasted money; he prefers to keep his own pot boiling. As for the little trader, hard put to it to pay his monthly accounts, and tied to the narrow round of his own business, tedious law proceedings, involving a heavy initial outlay, scare him; he gives up the attempt to see though the matter, follows the example of the great merchant, and makes up his mind to his loss. Wholesale merchants do not file their schedule in these days; they liquidate by private arrangement; their creditors take what is offered them, and give a receipt in full; a plan which saves publicity, and the delays of the law, and solicitors' fees, and depreciation of stock consequent on a sudden realisation. It is a common belief that it pays better to have a private arrangement than to force the estate into bankruptcy, so private arrangements are more frequent than failures in Paris.

The second act of the drama is intended to prove that a trustee is incorruptible; that there is not the slightest attempt at collusion between them and the debtor. The audience, who have most of them been at some time cast for the part of trustees themselves, know that a trustee is another name for a creditor whose claims are 'covered.' He listens, and believes as much as he pleases, till, after three months spent in investigating liabilities and assets, the day comes when composition is offered and accepted. Then the provisional trustees read a little report for

the assembled creditors. The following is a general formula :—

'GENTLEMEN,—The total amount owing to us was one million. We have dismantled our man like a stranded frigate. The sale of old iron, timber, and copper has brought in three hundred thousand francs, the assets therefore amount to thirty per cent. of the liabilities. In our joy at finding this sum, when our debtor might have left us a bare hundred thousand francs, we proclaim him to be an Aristides. We vote him crowns and a premium by way of encouragement! We propose to leave him his assets, and to give him ten or a dozen years in which to pay us the dividend of fifty per cent., which he condescends to promise us. Here is the *concordat*, walk up to the desk, and put your names to it!'

At these words the happy creditors fall on each other's necks and congratulate one another. When the *concordat* has been ratified by the Tribunal, the merchant's assets are put at his disposition, and he begins business again as if nothing had happened. He is at liberty to fail once more over the payment of the promised dividends—a sort of great-grandchild of a failure, which not seldom appears like an infant borne by a mother nine months after she has married her daughter.

If the *concordat* is not accepted, the creditors forthwith make a final appointment of trustees. They resort to extreme measures, and band themselves together to exploit the debtor's property and business; they lay their hands on everything he has or may have, his reversionary rights in the property of father and mother, uncles and aunts, and the like. This is a desperate remedy found by a 'union of the creditors.'

If a man fails in business, therefore, there are two ways open to him; by the first method, he takes things into his own hands, and means to recover himself; in the

second, having fallen into the water, he is content to go to the bottom. Pillerault knew the difference well. He was of Ragon's opinion, that it was as hard to issue from the first experience with clean hands as to emerge from the second a wealthy man. He counselled surrender at discretion, and betook himself to the most upright attorney on 'Change, asking him to conduct the liquidation, and to put the proceeds at the disposition of the creditors. The law requires that the creditors should make an allowance for the support of the debtor and his family while the drama is in progress. Pillerault gave notice to the registrar that he himself would maintain his niece and nephew.

Du Tillet had planned everything with a view to prolonging the agony of his old master's failure, and in the following manner. Time is so valuable in Paris, that, though there are usually two trustees appointed, one only acts in the case; the other is nominated for form's sake; he approves the proceedings, like the second notary in a notarial deed; and the active trustee as often as not leaves the work to the attorney employed by the bankrupt. By these means a failure of the first kind is conducted so vigorously that everything is patched up, fixed, settled, and arranged during the minimum time required by the legal procedure. In a hundred days the registrar might repeat the cold-blooded epigram of the Minister who announced that 'Order reigns in Warsaw.'

Du Tillet meant to make an end of César, commercially speaking. So the names of the trustees appointed through his influence had an ominous sound for Pillerault. M. Bidault, otherwise Gigonnet, the principal creditor, was to do nothing. Molineux, the fidgety little old person who had lost nothing, was to do everything. Du Tillet had thrown this noble corpse of a business to the little jackal to worry before he devoured it.

Little Molineux went home after the meeting of

creditors at which the trustees were appointed, 'honoured' (so he put it) 'by the suffrages of his fellow-citizens,' and as happy in the prospect of domineering over Birotteau as an urchin who has an insect to torment. The owner of house-property, being a stickler for the law, bought a copy of the *Code of Commerce*, and asked du Tillet to give him the benefit of his lights. Luckily, Joseph Lebas, forewarned by Pillerault, had, at the outset, obtained a sagacious and benevolent registrar, and Gobenheim-Keller (on whom du Tillet had fixed his choice) was replaced by M. Camusot, an assistant judge, and Pillerault's landlord, a Liberal, and a rich silk merchant, spoken of as an honourable man.

One of the most dreadful scenes in César's life was his enforced conference with little Molineux; the creature whom he had looked upon as such a nullity was now, by a legal fiction, become César Birotteau. There was no help for it; so, accompanied by his uncle, he climbed the six pair of stairs in the Cour Batave, reached the old man's dismal room, and confronted his guardian, his *quasi* judge, the man who represented the body of his creditors.

'What is the matter?' Pillerault asked on the stairs, hearing a groan from César.

'Oh! uncle, you do not know what kind of a man this Molineux is.'

'I have seen him at the Café David these fifteen years; he plays a game of dominoes there of an evening now and then. That is why I came with you.'

Molineux was prodigiously civil to Pillerault, and his manner towards the bankrupt was contemptuously patronising. The little old man had thought out his course, studied his behaviour down to the minutest details, and his ideas were ready prepared.

'What information do you want?' asked Pillerault. 'None of the claims are disputed.'

'Oh! the claims are all in order,' said little Molineux;

'they are all verified. The creditors are serious and *bona fide*! But there's the law, sir; there's the law! The bankrupt's expenditure is out of proportion to his means. It appears that the ball——'

'At which you were an invited guest,' put in Pillerault.

'Cost nearly sixty thousand francs! At any rate, that amount was spent on the occasion, and the debtor's capital at the time only amounted to a hundred and some odd thousand francs! There is warrant sufficient for bringing the matter before a registrar-extraordinary, as a case of bankruptcy caused by serious mismanagement.'

'Is that your opinion?' asked Pillerault, who noticed Birotteau's despondency at those words.

'Sir, the said Birotteau was a municipal officer, that makes a difference——'

'You did not send for us, I suppose, to tell us that the case was to be transferred to a criminal court,' said Pillerault. 'The whole Café David would laugh this evening at your conduct.'

The little old man seemed to stand in some awe of the opinion of the Café David; he gave Pillerault a scared look. He had reckoned upon dealing with Birotteau alone, and had promised himself that he would pose as sovereign lord and Jupiter. He had meant to strike terror into Birotteau's soul by the thunderbolts of a formal indictment, to brandish the axe above his head, to enjoy the spectacle of his anguish and alarm, and then to relent at the prayer of his victim, and send him away with eternal gratitude in his soul. But instead of the insect, he was confronted with this business-like old sphinx.

'There is nothing whatever to laugh at, sir!' said he.

'I beg your pardon,' returned Pillerault. 'You are consulting M. Claparon pretty freely; you are neglect-

ing the interests of the other creditors to obtain a decision that you have preferential claims. Now I, as a creditor, can intervene. The registrar is there.'

'Sir,' said Molineux, 'I am incorruptible.'

'I know you are,' said Pillerault; 'you are only getting yourself out of the scrape, as the saying is. You are shrewd; you have done as you did in the case of that tenant of yours——'

'Oh! sir, my lawsuit in the matter of the Rue Montorgueil is not decided yet!' cried the trustee, slipping back into the landlord at the word, just as the cat who became a woman pounced upon the mouse. 'A new issue, as they say, has been raised. It is not a subtenancy; he holds direct, and the scamp says now that as he paid his rent a year in advance, and there is only a year to run' (at this point Pillerault gave César a glance which recommended the closest attention to what should follow), 'and the year's rent being prepaid, he might clear his furniture out of the premises. So there is a new lawsuit. As a matter of fact, I ought to look after my guarantees until I am paid in full; there may be repairs which the tenant ought to pay for.'

'But you cannot distrain except for rent,' remarked Pillerault.

'And accessories!' cried Molineux, attacked in the centre. 'The article in the Code is interpreted by the light of decisions; there are precedents. The law, however, certainly wants mending in this respect. At this moment I am drafting a petition to his lordship the Keeper of the Seals concerning the hiatus. It would become the Government to consider the interests of owners of property. The State depends upon us, for we bear the brunt of the taxes.'

'You are well qualified to enlighten the Government,' said Pillerault; 'but on what point in this business of ours can we throw any light for you?'

'I want to know,' said Molineux with imperious

emphasis, 'whether M. Birotteau has received any money from M. Popinot.'

'No, sir,' answered Birotteau. A discussion followed as to Birotteau's interest in the firm of Popinot, in the course of which it was decided that Popinot had a right to demand the repayment of his advances in full without putting in his claim under the bankruptcy as one of Birotteau's creditors for the half of the expenses of starting his business, which Birotteau ought to have paid. Gradually, under Pillerault's handling, Molineux became more and more civil, a symptom which proved that he set no little store on the opinion of the frequenters of the Café David. Before the interview ended he was condoling with Birotteau, and asked him no less than Pillerault to share his humble dinner. If the ex-perfumer had gone by himself, he would perhaps have exasperated Molineux, and brought rancour into the business; and now, as at some other times, old Pillerault played the part of guardian angel.

One horrible form of torture the law inflicts upon bankrupts; they are bound to appear in person with the provisional trustees and the registrar at the meeting of creditors which decides their fate. For a man who can rise above it, as for the merchant who is seeking his *revanche*, the dismal ceremony is not very formidable; but for any one like César the whole thing is an agony only paralleled by the last day in the condemned cell. Pillerault did all in his power to make that day endurable to his nephew.

Molineux's proceedings, sanctioned by the bankrupt, had been on this wise. The lawsuit concerning the mortgage on the property in the Faubourg du Temple had been gained in the Court of Appeal. The trustees decided to sell the land, and César made no objections. Du Tillet, knowing that the Government meant to construct a canal to open communication between Saint-Denis and the Upper Seine, and that the canal would

pass through the Faubourg du Temple, bought César's property for seventy thousand francs. César's rights in the Madeleine building-land were abandoned to M. Claparon, on condition that he on his side should make no demand for half the registration fees, which César should have paid on the completion of the contract; it was arranged that Claparon should take over the land and pay for it, and receive the dividend in the bankruptcy which was due to the vendors.

The perfumer's interest in the firm of Popinot & Company was sold to the said Popinot for forty-eight thousand francs. Célestin Crevel bought the business as a going concern for fifty-seven thousand francs, together with the lease of the premises, the stock, the fittings, the proprietary rights in the Pâte des Sultanes and Carminative Toilet Lotion, a twelve years' lease of the factory and the plant being included in the sale.

The liquid assets reached a total of one hundred and ninety-five thousand francs, to which the trustees added seventy thousand francs from the liquidation of 'that unlucky fellow Roguin.' Two hundred and sixty-five thousand francs in all. The liabilities amounted to about four hundred and forty thousand francs, so that there would be a dividend of more than fifty per cent.

A liquidation is something like a chemical process, from which the clever insolvent merchant endeavours to emerge as a saturated solution. Birotteau, distilled entirely in this retort, yielded a result which infuriated du Tillet. Du Tillet thought that there would be a dishonouring bankruptcy, and behold a liquidation highly creditable to his man. He cared very little about the pecuniary gain, for he would have the building-land by the Madeleine without opening his purse; he wished to see the poor merchant disgraced, ruined, and humbled in the dust. The meeting of creditors would doubtless carry out the perfumer in triumph on their shoulders.

As Birotteau's courage returned, his uncle, like a wise

physician, gradually told him the details of the proceedings in bankruptcy. These rigorous measures were so many heavy blows. A merchant cannot but feel depressed when the things on which he has spent so much money and so much thought are sold for so little. He was petrified with astonishment at the tidings which Pillerault brought.

'Fifty-seven thousand francs for the *Queen of Roses!* Why, the stock is worth ten thousand francs! We spent forty thousand francs on the rooms, and the fittings, the plant, the moulds and boilers over at the factory cost thirty thousand francs! Why, if the things are sold for half their value, there is the worth of ten thousand francs in the shop, and the Pâte des Sultanes and the Lotion are as good as a farm!'

Poor ruined César's jeremiads did not alarm Pillerault very much. The old merchant took them much as a horse takes a shower of rain; but when he came to talk of the meeting of creditors, César's gloomy silence frightened him. Those who understand the weakness and vanity of human nature in every social sphere, will understand that for an ex-judge a return as a bankrupt to the Palais where he had sat was a ghastly form of torture. He must receive his enemies in the very place where he had been so often thanked for his services; he, Birotteau, whose views as to bankruptcy were so well known in Paris, he who had said, 'A man who files his schedule is an honest man still, but by the time he comes out of a meeting of creditors he is a rogue.' His uncle watched for favourable opportunities, and tried to accustom him to the idea of appearing before his creditors assembled, as the law requires. This condition was killing Birotteau. His dumb resignation made a deep impression on Pillerault, who, through the thin partition wall, used to hear him cry at night. 'Never! never! I will die sooner.'

Pillerault, so strong himself by reason of his simple

life, understood weakness. He made up his mind to spare Birotteau the anguish to which his nephew might succumb, the dreadful and inevitable meeting with his creditors! The law is precise, positive, and unflinching in this respect; the debtor who refuses to appear is liable on these grounds alone to have his case transferred out of the commercial into the criminal court. But if the law compels the appearance of the debtor, it exercises no such constraint upon the creditors.

A meeting of creditors is a mere formality except in certain cases; when, for example, a rogue is to be ousted, or the creditors unite to refuse the dividend offered, or cannot agree among themselves because some of their number are privileged to the prejudice of the rest, or the dividend offered is outrageously small, and the bankrupt is doubtful of obtaining a majority to carry the resolution. But when the estate has been honestly liquidated, or when a rascally debtor has squared everybody, the meeting is only a matter of form. So Pillerault went round to the creditors one after another, and asked each to empower his attorney to represent him on that occasion. Every creditor, du Tillet excepted, was sorry for Birotteau now that he had been brought low. All of them knew how he had behaved, how well his books had been kept, and how straightforward he had been in the matter. They were well pleased to find not one 'gay' creditor among their number. Molineux, as agent in the first place, and afterwards as trustee, had found all that the poor man possessed, down to the print of *Hero and Leander* which Popinot had given him. Birotteau had not taken away such small matters as his gold-buckles, his pin, and the two watches, which even an honest man might not have scrupled to keep. This touching obedience to the law made a great sensation in commercial circles. Birotteau's enemies represented these things as conclusive signs of the man's stupidity; but sensible people saw them in their true light, as a

magnificent excess of honesty. In two months a change had been brought about in opinion on 'Change. The most indifferent admitted that this failure was one of the greatest curiosities of commerce ever heard of. So when the creditors knew that they were to receive sixty per cent., they agreed to do all that Pillerault asked of them. There are but few attorneys practising at the Tribunal; so several of the creditors deputed the same man to represent them, and the whole formidable assemblage was reduced to three attorneys, Ragon, the two trustees, and the registrar.

'César, you can go without fear to your meeting to-day; you will find nobody there,' Pillerault said on the morning of that memorable day.

M. Ragon wished to go with his debtor. At the sound of the thin elderly voice of the previous owner of the *Queen of Roses*, all the colour left his successor's face; but the kind little old man held out his arms, and Birotteau went to him like a child to his father, and both shed tears. This indulgent goodness put fresh heart into César, and he followed his uncle to the cab.

Punctually at half-past three they arrived in the Clôitre Saint-Merri, where the Tribunal of Commerce then held its sessions. The Salle des Faillites was deserted. The day and the hour had been fixed to that end with the approbation of the trustees and the registrar. The attorneys were there on behalf of their clients; there was nothing to fill César's soul with dread; and yet the poor man could not enter M. Camusot's room (which had once been his) without deep emotion, and he shuddered as he went through the Salle des Faillites.

'It is cold,' said M. Camusot, turning to Birotteau; 'these gentlemen will not be sorry to stay here instead of being frozen in the Salle.' (He would not say the Salle des Faillites.) 'Seat yourselves, gentlemen.'

Every one sat down; the registrar put César, still

confused, into his own armchair. Then trustees and attorneys signed their names.

'In consideration of the abandonment of your estate,' said Camusot, again addressing Birotteau, 'your creditors unanimously agree to forgo the remainder of their claims; your *concordat* is couched in language which may soften your regrets; your attorney will have it confirmed by the Tribunal at once. So you are discharged. All the judges of the Tribunal have felt sorry that you should be placed in such a position, dear M. Birotteau, without being surprised by your courage,' Camusot went on, taking Birotteau's hands, 'and there is no one but appreciates your integrity. Through your disasters you have shown yourself worthy of the position which you held here. I have been in business these twenty years, and this is the second time that I have seen a merchant rise in public esteem "after his failure."'

Birotteau grasped the registrar's hand and squeezed it. There were tears in his eyes. Camusot asked him what he meant to do, and Birotteau answered that he was going to work, and that he intended to pay his creditors in full.

'If you should be in want of a few thousand francs to carry out your noble design, you will always find them if you come to me,' said Camusot; 'I would give them with great pleasure to see a thing not often seen in Paris.'

Pillerault, Ragon, and Birotteau left the Tribunal.

'Well, was it so bad after all?' said Pillerault, when they stood outside.

'I can see your hand in it, uncle,' said César, deeply touched.

'And now that you are on your feet again, come and see my nephew,' said Ragon; 'it is only a step to the Rue des Cinq-Diamants.'

It was with a cruel pang that César looked up and saw Constance sitting at her desk in a room on the low dark floor above the shop; dark, for a signboard outside,

on which the name 'A. Popinot' was painted, cut off one-third of the light from the window.

'Here is one of Alexander's lieutenants,' said Birotteau, pointing to the sign with the forced mirth of misfortune.

This constrained gaiety, the naïve expression of Birotteau's old belief in his superior talents, made Ragon shudder, despite his seventy years. But César's cheerfulness broke down when his wife brought down letters for Popinot to sign, and his face turned white in spite of himself.

'Good evening, dear,' she said, smiling at him.

'I need not ask whether you are comfortable here,' César said, and he looked at Popinot.

'I might be in my own son's house,' she said, and her husband was struck by the tender expression which crossed her face.

Birotteau embraced Popinot, saying, 'I have just lost for ever the right to call you my son.'

'Let us hope,' said Popinot. '*Your* Oil is going well, thanks to our efforts in the newspapers, and thanks to Gaudissart, who has been all over, and flooded France with placards and prospectuses. He is having prospectuses in German printed at Strasbourg, and is just about to descend on Germany like an invasion. We have orders for three thousand gross.'

'Three thousand gross!' echoed César.

'And I have bought some land in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, not badly; a factory is to be built there. I shall keep on at the other place in the Faubourg du Temple.'

'With a little help, wife,' Birotteau said in Constance's ear, 'we shall pull through.'

From that memorable day César and his wife and daughter understood one another. Poor clerk, as he was, he had set himself a task which, if not impossible, was gigantic; he would pay his creditors in full! The three, united by a common bond of fierce independence,

grew miserly, and denied themselves everything; every farthing was consecrated to this end. Césarine, with one object in her mind, threw herself into her work with a young girl's devotion. She spent her nights in devising schemes for increasing the prosperity of the house; she invented designs for materials, and brought her inborn business faculties into play. Her employers were obliged to check her ardour for work, and rewarded her with presents, but she declined the ornaments and trinkets which they offered; it was money that she preferred. Every month she took her salary, her little earnings, to her Uncle Pillerault, and César and Mme. Birotteau did the same. All three of them recognised their lack of ability, and shrank from assuming the responsible task of investing their savings. So the uncle went into business again, and studied the money market. At a later time it was known that Jules Desmarets and Joseph Lebas had helped him with their counsel; both had zealously looked for safe investments.

Birotteau, living in his uncle's house, did not even dare to ask any questions about the uses to which the family savings were put. He went through the streets with a bent head, shrinking from all eyes, downcast, nervous, blind to all that passed. It vexed him that he must wear fine cloth.

'At any rate, I am not eating my creditors' bread,' he said, with an angelic glance at the kind old man. 'Your bread is sweet' (he went on), 'although you give it me out of pity, when I think that, thanks to this sacred charity, I am not robbing my creditors of my earnings.'

The merchants who met the Birotteau of those days could not see a trace of the Birotteau whom they used to know. Vast thoughts were awakened in indifferent beholders at sight of that face so dark with the blackest misery, of the man who had never been thoughtful so bowed down beneath the weight of a thought; it was a revelation of the depths, in that this being, dwelling on

so ordinary a human level, could have had so far to fall. To the man who would fain be wiped out comes no extinction. Shallow natures who lack a conscience, and are incapable of much feeling, can never furnish forth the tragedy of man and fate. Religion alone sets its peculiar seal on those who have sounded these depths; they believe in a future and in a Providence; a certain light shines in them, a look of holy resignation, blended with hope, which touches those who behold it; they know all that they have lost, like the exiled angel weeping at the gates of Heaven. A bankrupt cannot show his face on 'Change; and César, thrust out from the society of honest men, was like the angel sighing for pardon.

For fourteen months César refused all amusements; his mind was full of religious thoughts, inspired by his fall. Sure though he was of the Ragons' friendship, it was impossible to induce him to dine with them; nor would he visit the Lebas, nor the Matifats, the Protez and Chiffrevilles, nor even M. Vauquelin, though all were anxious to show their admiration for Cesar's behaviour. He would rather be alone in his own room, where he could not meet the eyes of any one to whom he owed money; and the most cordial kindness on the part of his friends recalled him to a sense of the bitterness of his position.

Constance and Césarine went nowhere. On Sundays and holidays, the only times when they were free, the two women went first to Mass, and then home with César after the service. Pillerault used to ask the Abbé Loraux to come—the Abbé Loraux who had sustained César in his trouble, and they made a family party. The old ironmonger could not but approve his nephew's scruples, his own sense of commercial honour was too keen; and therefore his mind was bent upon increasing the number of people whom the bankrupt might look in the face with a clear brow.

In May 1821 the efforts of the family thus struggling

with adversity were rewarded by a holiday, contrived by the arbiter of their destinies. The first Sunday in that month was the anniversary of the betrothal of César and Constance. Pillerault and the Ragons had taken a little house in the country at Sceaux, and the old ironmonger wanted to make a festival of the house-warming.

On the Saturday evening he spoke to his nephew. 'We are going into the country to-morrow, César,' he said, 'and you must come too.'

César, who wrote a beautiful hand, copied documents for Derville and several other lawyers in the evenings, and on Sundays (with a dispensation from the curé) he worked like a negro.

'No,' he answered; 'M. Derville is waiting for an account of a guardianship.'

'Your wife and daughter deserve a holiday, and there will be no one but our friends—the Abbé Loraux, the Ragons, and Popinot and his uncle. Besides, I want you to come.'

César and his wife, carried away by the daily round of their busy lives, had never gone back to Sceaux, though from time to time they both had wished to see the garden again, and the lime-tree beneath which César had almost swooned with joy, in the days when he was still an assistant at the *Queen of Roses*. To-day, when Popinot drove them, and Birotteau sat with Constance and their daughter, his wife's eyes turned to his from time to time, but the look of intelligence in them drew no answering smile from his lips. She whispered a few words in his ear, but a shake of the head was the only response. The sweet expressions of tenderness, unalterable, but now forced somewhat, brought no light into César's eyes; his face grew gloomier, the tears which he had kept back began to fill his eyes. Twenty years ago he had been along this very road, when he was young and prosperous and full of hope, the lover of a girl as lovely as Césarine, who was with them now. Then he had

dreamed of happiness to come; to-day he saw his noble child's face, pale with long hours of work, and his brave wife, of whose great beauty there remained such traces as are left to a beautiful city after the lava flood has poured over it. Of all that had been, love alone was left. César's attitude repressed the joy in the girl's heart and in Anselme, the two who now represented the lovers of that bygone day.

'Be happy, children; you deserve to be happy,' said the poor father, in heartrending tones. 'You can love each other with no after-thoughts,' added he; and as he spoke, he took both his wife's hands in his and kissed them with a reverent, admiring affection which touched her more than the brightest cheerfulness. Pillerault, the Ragons, the Abbé Loraux, and Popinot the elder were all waiting for them at the house; there was an understanding among those five kindly souls, and their manner, and looks, and words put César at his ease, for it went to their hearts to see him always as if on the morrow of his failure.

'Take a walk in the Bois d'Aulnay,' said Pillerault, putting César's hand into his wife's hand. 'Go and take Anselme and Césarine with you, and come back again at four o'clock.'

'Poor things, we are in the way,' said Mme. Ragon, touched by her debtor's unfeigned misery; 'he will be very happy before long.'

'It is a repentance without the sin,' said the Abbé Loraux.

'He could only have grown great through misfortune,' said the judge.

The power of forgetting is the great secret of strong and creative natures; they forget after the manner of nature, who knows nothing of a past; with every hour she begins afresh the constant mysterious workings of fertility. But weak natures, like Birotteau, take their sorrows into their lives instead of transmuting them into

the axioms of experience; and, steeping themselves in their troubles, wear themselves out by reverting daily to the old unhappiness.

When the two couples had found the footpath which leads to the Bois d'Aulnay, set like a crown on one of the loveliest of the low hills about Paris; when the Vallée-aux-Loups lay below them in its enchanting beauty, the bright day, the charm of the view, the fresh green leaves about them, and delicious memories of that fairest day of their youth, relaxed the chords which grief had strung to resonance in César's soul; he held his wife's arm tightly against his beating heart; his eyes were glazed no longer, a glad light shone in them.

'At last I see you again, my dear César,' Constance said. 'It seems to me that we are behaving well enough to allow ourselves a little pleasure from time to time.'

'How can I?' poor Birotteau answered. 'Oh! Constance, your love is the one good left to me. I have lost everything, even the confidence that I used to have in myself. I have no heart left in me; I want to live long enough to pay my dues on earth before I die, and that is all. You, dear, who have been wisdom and prudence for me, who saw things clearly, you who are not to blame, may be glad. Among us three, I am the only guilty one. Eighteen months ago, at that unlucky ball, I saw this Constance of mine, the only woman whom I have loved, more beautiful perhaps than the young girl with whom I wandered along this path twenty years ago, as our children are wandering together now. . . . In less than two years I have blighted that beauty, my pride, and I had a right to be proud of it. I love you more as I know you better. . . . Oh! dearest!' and his tone gave the word an eloquence that went to his wife's heart, 'if only I might hear you scold me, instead of soothing my distress.'

'I did not think it possible,' she said, 'that a woman

could love her husband more after twenty years of life together.'

For a moment César forgot all his troubles at the words that brought such a wealth of happiness to a heart like his. It was with something like joy in his soul that he went towards *their* tree, which by some chance had not been cut down. Husband and wife sat down beneath it, and watched Anselme and Césarine, who walked to and fro on the same plot of grass, unconscious of their movements, fancying perhaps that they were still walking on and on.

'Mademoiselle,' Anselme was saying, 'do you think me so base and so greedy as to take advantage of the fact that I own your father's interest in the Cephalic Oil? I have carefully set aside his share of the profits; I am keeping them for him. I am adding interest to the money; if there are any doubtful debts, I pass them to my own account. We can only belong to each other when your father has been rehabilitated; I am trying with all the strength that love gives me to bring that day soon.'

He had carefully kept his secret from Césarine's mother; but the simplest lover is always anxious to be great in his love's eyes.

'And will it come soon?' she asked.

'Very soon,' said Popinot.

The tone in which the answer was given was so penetrating, that the innocent and pure-hearted girl held up her forehead for her lover's kiss, fervent and respectful, for Césarine's noble nature had spoken so plainly in the impulse.

'Everything is going well, papa,' she said, with the air of one who knows a great deal. 'Be nice, and talk, and don't look so sad any longer.'

When these four people, so closely bound together, returned to Pillerault's new house, César, unobservant though he was, felt from the Ragons' altered manner

that something was impending. Mme. Ragon was peculiarly gracious; her look and tone said plainly to César, 'We are paid.'

After dinner the notary of Sceaux appeared. Pillerault asked him to be seated, and glanced at Birotteau, who began to suspect some surprise, though he did not imagine how great it would be. Pillerault began—

'Your savings for eighteen months, nephew, and those of your wife and daughter amount to twenty thousand francs. I received thirty thousand francs in the shape of dividend, so we have fifty thousand francs to divide among your creditors. M. Ragon has received thirty thousand francs as dividend; so this gentleman, who is the notary of Sceaux, is about to hand you a receipt in full for principal and interest, paid to your friends. The rest of the money is with Crottat for Lourdois, old Mme. Madou, the builder, and the carpenter, and the more pressing of your creditors. Next year we shall see. One can go a long way with time and patience.'

Birotteau's joy cannot be described; he embraced his uncle, and shed tears.

'Let him wear his Cross to-day,' said Ragon, addressing the Abbé Loraux, and the confessor fastened the red ribbon to César's buttonhole. A score of times that evening he looked at himself in the mirrors on the walls of the sitting-room with a delight which people who believe themselves to be superior would laugh at; but these good-hearted citizens saw nothing unnatural in it. The next day Birotteau went to see Mme. Madou.

'Oh! is that you!' she cried; 'I did not know you, old man, you have grown so grey. Still, the like of you don't come to grief; there are places under Government for you. I myself am working as hard as a poodle that turns a spit, and deserves to be christened.'

'But, madame——'

'Oh, I'm not blaming you,' she said; 'you had your discharge.'

'I have come to tell you that I will pay you the balance to-day, at Maître Crottat's office, and interest also——'

'Really?'

'You must be there at half-past eleven.'

'There's honesty for you! good measure, and thirteen to the dozen,' cried she, in outspoken admiration. 'Stop, sir, I do a good trade with that red-haired youngster of yours; he is a nice young fellow; he lets me make my profit without haggling over the price, so as to make up to me for the loss. Well, then, I will give you the receipt; keep your money, poor old soul! La Madou fires up like tinder, she hollers out, but she has something here,' and she tapped the most ample cushion of live flesh ever known in the Great Market.

'Never!' said Birotteau, 'the law is explicit; I mean to pay you in full.'

'Then there is no need to keep on begging and praying of me. And to-morrow at the Market I will sound your praises; they shall all know about you. Oh! it is a rare joke!'

The worthy man went through the same scene again with the house-painter, Crottat's father-in-law, but with some variations. It was raining. César left his umbrella in a corner by the door, and the well-to-do house-painter, sitting at breakfast with his wife in a handsomely furnished room, saw the stream of water trickle across the floor, and was not too considerate.

'Hallo, poor old Birotteau, what do you want?' he asked, in the hard tone which people use to a tiresome beggar.

'Has not your son-in-law asked you, sir——'

'What?' Lourdois broke in impatiently. Some request was to follow, he thought.

'To go to his office this morning at half-past eleven, to give me a receipt in full for the balance of your claim.'

'Oh! that is another thing! Just sit you down, M. Birotteau, and take a bite with us——'

'Do us the honour of breakfasting with us,' said Mme. Lourdois.

'Doing pretty well?' asked her burly spouse.

'No, sir. I have had to lunch off a roll in my office to get some money together, but I hope in time to repair the wrong done to my neighbours.'

'Really, you are a man of honour,' remarked the house-painter, as he swallowed a mouthful of bread and butter and Strasbourg pie.

'And what is Mme. Birotteau doing?' asked Mme Lourdois.

'She is keeping the books in M. Anselme Popinot's counting-house.'

'Poor things!' said Mme. Lourdois, in a low voice.

'If you should want me, come and see me, my dear M. Birotteau,' began Lourdois; 'I might be of use——'

'I want you at eleven o'clock, sir,' said Birotteau, and with that he went.

This first result gave Birotteau fresh courage, but it did not give him peace of mind. The desire to redeem his character perturbed him beyond all measure. He completely lost the bloom which used to appear in his face, his eyes grew dull, his cheeks hollow. Old acquaintances who met him at eight o'clock in the morning, or after four in the afternoon on his way to and from the Rue de l'Oratoire, saw a pale-faced, nervous, white-haired man, wearing the same overcoat which he had had at the time of the bankruptcy (for he was as careful of it as a poor sub-lieutenant who economises his uniform). Sometimes they would stop him in spite of himself, for he was quick-sighted, slinking home, keeping close to the wall like a thief.

'People know how you have behaved, my friend,' they would say. 'Everybody is sorry to see how hardly you live, you and your wife and daughter.'

'Take a little more time about it,' others would suggest. 'A wound in the purse is not mortal.'

'No, but a wound in the soul is deadly indeed,' the poor feeble César said one day in answer to Matifat.

At the beginning of the year 1823 the Canal Saint-Martin was decided upon, and land in the Faubourg du Temple fetched fabulous prices. The canal would actually pass through the property once César's, now du Tillet's. The company who had purchased the concession were prepared to pay du Tillet an exorbitant sum for the land if he would put them in possession within a given time, and Popinot's lease was the one obstacle in the way. So du Tillet went to see the druggist in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants.

If Popinot himself regarded du Tillet with indifference, as Césarine's lover he felt an instinctive hatred of the man. He knew nothing of the theft, nor of the disgraceful machinations of the lucky banker, but a voice within him said, 'This is a thief who goes unpunished.' Popinot had not had the slightest transaction with du Tillet, whose presence was hateful to him, and particularly hateful at that moment when he beheld du Tillet enriched with the spoils of his employer's property, for the building-land at the Madeleine was beginning to command prices which presaged the exorbitant sums which were asked for them in 1827. So when the banker explained the reason of his visit, Popinot looked at him with concentrated indignation.

'I do not mean to refuse outright to surrender my lease, but I must have sixty thousand francs for it, and I will not bate a farthing.'

'Sixty thousand francs!' cried du Tillet, making as though he would go.

'The lease has fifteen years to run, and it will take another three thousand francs per annum to replace the factory. So, sixty thousand francs, or we will say no

more about it,' said Popinot, turning into the shop, whither du Tillet followed him.

The discussion waxed warm, when Mme. Birotteau, hearing her husband's name pronounced, came downstairs, and saw du Tillet for the first time since the famous ball. He, on his side, could not avoid making a startled gesture at the sight of the change wrought in her face; he was frightened at his work, and lowered his eyes.

'This gentleman is receiving three hundred thousand francs for *your* land,' said Popinot, addressing Mme. César, 'and he declines to pay *us* sixty thousand francs by way of indemnity for *our* lease——'

'Three thousand francs per annum,' said du Tillet, laying stress on the words.

'*Three thousand francs!*' Madame César repeated the words quietly and significantly.

Du Tillet turned pale; Popinot looked at Mme. Birotteau. There was a pause and a deep silence, which made the scene still more inexplicable to Anselme.

'Sign your surrender,' said du Tillet; 'I have had the document drafted by Crottat,' and he drew a stamped agreement from a side-pocket. 'I will give you a draft on the Bank for sixty thousand francs.'

Popinot stared at Mme. César with great and unfeigned astonishment; he thought that he was dreaming. While du Tillet was making out his draft at a desk, Mme. César vanished upstairs again. The druggist and the banker exchanged papers, and du Tillet went out with a frigid bow to Popinot.

'At last!' cried Popinot. 'Only a few months now, and I shall have my Césarine, thanks to this queer business,' and he watched du Tillet turn into the Rue des Lombards, where his cab was waiting for him. 'My dear little wife shall not wear herself to death at her work. What! was a look from Mme. César enough? What is there between her and that brigand? It is a very extraordinary thing.'

Popinot sent the draft to be cashed at the bank, and went up to speak to Mme. Birotteau; but she was not in the counting-house, doubtless she had gone to her room. Anselme and Constance lived like a mother-in-law and son-in-law when these are on good terms with each other, so he went to Constance's room in all the haste natural in a lover who sees happiness within his grasp.

Great was his astonishment to find his mother-in-law (whom he surprised by springing into the room) reading a letter from du Tillet, for Anselme recognised the handwriting at once. The sight of a lighted candle and black phantom scraps of burnt paper on the floor sent a shudder through Popinot, whose long-sighted eyes had involuntarily read the words with which the letter began, 'I adore you! You know it, angel of my life, and why——'

'What hold have you on du Tillet to make him conclude such a bargain as this?' he asked, with the jerky laugh of repressed suspicion.

'Let us not talk of it,' she said, and he saw that she was painfully agitated.

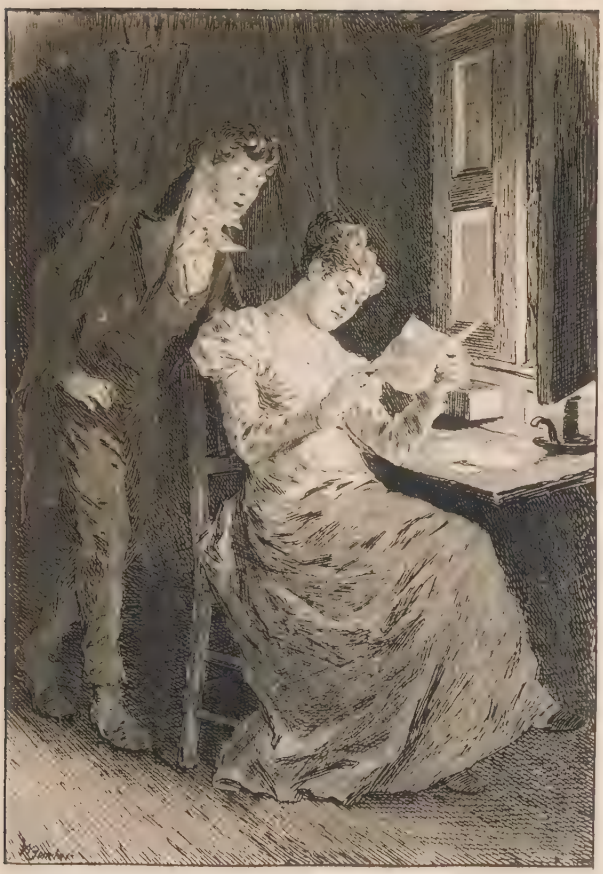
'Yes,' answered Popinot, quite taken aback, 'we must talk of the end of your troubles.' Anselme swung round on his heels and drummed on the window-pane, staring out into the yard. 'Very well,' said he to himself, 'and suppose that she loved du Tillet, is that any reason why I should not behave like a man of honour?'

'What is it, my boy?' the poor woman asked.

'The net profits on the Cephalic Oil amount to two hundred and forty-two thousand francs, and the half of two hundred and forty-two is one hundred and twenty-one,' said Popinot abruptly. 'If I deduct from that sum the forty-eight thousand francs already paid to M. Birotteau, there still remain seventy-three thousand; add to it the sixty thousand just paid for the surrender of the lease, and *you* will have one hundred and thirty-three thousand francs.'

Great was his astonishment to find his mother-in-law reading a letter from du Tillet

Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher



Mme. César listened in such glad excitement, that Popinot could hear the beating of her heart.

'Well, I have always looked on M. Birotteau as my partner,' he continued; 'we can employ the money in repaying his creditors. Your savings, twenty-eight thousand francs, in Uncle Pillerault's keeping, will raise the sum to a hundred and sixty-one thousand francs. Uncle will not refuse to give us a receipt for his twenty-five thousand francs. No power on earth can prevent my lending to my father-in-law, on account of next year's profits, enough to pay off the remainder of his creditors. . . . And—he will—be—rehabilitated——'

'Rehabilitated!' cried Mme. César, kneeling before her chair, and, clasping her hands, she repeated a prayer. The letter had slipped from her fingers. She crossed herself. 'Dear Anselme!' she said, 'dear boy!' She took his face in her hands, kissed him on the forehead, and held him tightly in her arms. 'Césarine is yours indeed,' she cried. 'My daughter will be very happy. She will leave the house where she is working herself to death.'

'Through love,' said Anselme.

'Yes,' smiled the mother.

'Listen to a little secret,' said Anselme, looking out of the corner of his eye at the unlucky letter. 'I obliged Célestin when he wanted capital to buy your business, but it was on one condition. Your rooms are just as you left them. I had my own idea, but I did not think then that fortune would favour us so greatly. Célestin has undertaken to sub-let your old rooms to you; he has not set foot in them, and all the furniture there is yours. I am reserving the second story, so that Césarine and I may live there; she shall never leave you. After we are married, I will spend the day here from eight o'clock in the morning till six in the evening. Then I will buy out M. César's interest in the business for a hundred thousand francs, so that, with his post, you will have ten thousand livres a year. Will you not be happy?'

'Do not say any more, Anselme, or I shall go mad with joy.'

Mme. César's angelic bearing, her pure eyes, the innocence on her fair brow, gave the lie so magnificently to the countless thoughts which surged up in the young lover's brain, that he made up his mind to slay the chimeras of his fancy. The sin was irreconcilable with the life and the sentiments of Pillerault's niece.

'My dear adored mother,' he began, 'a horrible doubt has just crossed my mind. If you would see me happy, you will set it at rest.'

Popinot held out his hand as he spoke, and took possession of the letter.

'Unintentionally I read the first words in du Tillet's handwriting,' he said, alarmed at the consternation in her face. 'The words coincide so oddly with the effect you just produced upon the man, who complied at once with my extravagant demands, that anybody would find the explanation which the devil suggests to me in spite of myself. A glance from you, and three words were enough——'

'Stop,' said Mme. César, and taking back the letter, she burned it under Anselme's eyes. 'I am cruelly punished for a trifling fault, my child. And now you must know all, Anselme. The suspicion attaching to the mother must not do her daughter an injury, and besides, I may speak without a blush; I could tell my husband this that I am about to tell you. Du Tillet tried to seduce me, my husband was warned at once, and du Tillet was to be dismissed. The very day that my husband was to discharge him du Tillet took three thousand francs.'

'I suspected it,' said Popinot, with all his hatred of the man in his tone.

'Anselme, your future and your happiness required this confidence, but it must die in your own breast, as

it had died in César's and mine. You surely remember the fuss my husband made about the mistake in the books. M. Birotteau, no doubt, put three thousand francs into the safe (the price of the shawl, which was not given to me for three years), so as to avoid ruining the young man by bringing him into a police court. So there you have the explanation of my cry of surprise. Alas, my dear boy, I will confess my childish conduct. Du Tillet had written three love letters to me, letters which showed his nature so plainly that I kept them—as a curiosity. I only read them once; but, after all, it was not wise to keep them. When I saw du Tillet, I thought of them, and went up to my room to burn them. When you came in, I was looking at the last one. That is all, my dear.'

Anselme knelt and kissed Mme. César's hand. The expression in his eyes drew tears of admiring affection from hers. Constance raised her son-in-law, and clasped him to her heart.

That day was destined to be a day of joy for César. The King's private secretary, M. de Vandenesse, came to the office to speak with him. They went out together into the little courtyard of the Sinking-Fund Department.

'M. Birotteau,' said the Vicomte, 'the story of your struggle to pay your creditors came by chance to the King's knowledge. His Majesty was touched by such unusual conduct; and learning that, from motives of humility, you were not wearing the Order of the Legion of Honour, has sent me to command you to resume it. His Majesty also wishes to assist you to discharge your obligations, and has ordered me to pay this amount to you out of his own privy purse, with regrets that he can do no more for you. Let the matter remain a profound secret, for His Majesty thinks it little becomes a King to make official proclamation of his good actions,' and the private secretary paid over six thousand francs to

the employé, who heard these words with indescribable emotions.

Birotteau could only stammer inarticulate thanks. Vandenesse smiled, and waved his hand. César's principles are so rarely seen in practice in Paris, that by degrees his life had won admiration. Joseph Lebas, Popinot the elder, Camusot, Ragon, the Abbé Loraux, the head partner of the firm which employed Césarine, Lourdois, and M. de la Billardière had spoken of it. The scale of opinion had already turned in his favour, and people praised him to the skies.

'There goes a man of honour!' The word had reached César's ears several times in the street; he heard them with the sensations of an author who hears his name pronounced. This fair renown disgusted du Tillet. César's first thought on receiving the King's bank-notes was of repayment to his ex-assistant. The good man betook himself to the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, and it so fell out that the banker, returning home from business, met him upon the staircase.

'Well, my poor Birotteau,' said he, in a caressing tone.

'Poor?' the other cried proudly. 'I am very rich. I shall lay my head on the pillow to-night with the satisfaction of knowing that I have paid you.'

The words, so full of honesty, put du Tillet for a moment on the rack. Every one respected him, but he had lost his self-respect; a voice which could not be stifled cried within him, 'This man is heroic!' But he spoke—

'Pay me! What business can you be in?'

Birotteau felt quite sure that du Tillet would not repeat the story.

'I shall never start in business again, sir. No human power could foresee the thing that befell me. Who knows but that I might be the victim of another Roguin? But my conduct has been put before the King, his heart has deigned to compassionate my

struggles, and he has encouraged them by sending me at once a fairly large sum, which——'

'Do you want a receipt in full?' du Tillet cut him short. 'Are you paying——'

'In full, and interest besides. So I must beg you to come to M. Crottat's office, a step or two away.'

'In the presence of a notary!'

'Why, sir, there is nothing to prevent me from thinking of my rehabilitation, and a document so authenticated is legal evidence——'

'Come, let us go,' said du Tillet, and he went out with Birotteau; 'it is only a step. But who will find you so much money?' he went on.

'No one finds it for me,' said César. 'I am earning it by the sweat of my brow.'

'You owe an enormous amount to Claparon.'

'Alas! yes, that is the heaviest of my debts; I am afraid the effort will be too much for me.'

'Oh! you will never be able to pay it all,' said du Tillet harshly.

'He is right,' thought Birotteau.

He went home again by way of the Rue Saint-Honoré, a piece of inadvertence, for he always went round some other way, that he might not see his shop, nor the windows of his old home. For the first time since his fall, he saw the house where he had spent eighteen happy years, and three months of anguish that effaced those memories.

'I used to count on ending my days there,' he said to himself; and he quickened his pace at the sight of a new name on the shop front—

CÉLESTIN CREVEL
Late César Birotteau.

'My eyes dazzle. . . . Is that Césarine?' he cried, thinking that he had seen a golden head at the window.

It was really Césarine whom he saw, and his wife was there, and so was Popinot. The two lovers knew that Birotteau never went past his old home; and it was impossible that they should imagine the great event in the Rue de l'Oratoire, so they had gone to make arrangements for the fête they were planning to give in Birotteau's honour. The strange apparition astonished César so much that he stood stockstill.

'There is M. Birotteau looking at his old house,' said M. Molineux to a shopkeeper who lived over against the *Queen of Roses*.

'Poor man!' returned Birotteau's old neighbour, 'he gave one of the grandest balls there—there were two hundred carriages in the street.'

'I went to it; he went bankrupt three months afterwards, and I was trustee,' said Molineux.

Birotteau fled, his legs trembling beneath him, and reached Pillerault's house.

Pillerault knew what was passing in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, and it seemed to him that his nephew was scarcely fit to bear the shock of a joy so great as his rehabilitation. He had been a daily witness of Cesar's mental sufferings, knew that Birotteau's own stern doctrine as to bankrupts was always in his thoughts, and that he was living up to the very limit of his strength. Dead honour might yet have its Easter Day for him; and it was this hope that gave him no respite from pain. Pillerault undertook to prepare César for the good news; so when he came in, his uncle was thinking how to attain his end. Cesar began to tell the news of the interest that the King had taken in him, his joy seemed to Pillerault to be auspicious, and his amazement that Césarine should be at the window at the sign of the *Queen of Roses* afforded an excellent opening.

'Well, César,' Pillerault began, 'do you know what brought it about? Popinot is impatient to marry Cesarine. He will not and ought not to be bound any

longer by your extravagant ideas of honour, to spend his youth in eating dry bread and smelling a good dinner. Popinot is determined to pay off your creditors in full.'

'He is going to buy his wife.'

'Isn't it to his credit that he wants to rehabilitate his father-in-law?'

'But questions might be raised, and besides——'

'And besides,' cried Uncle Pillerault in feigned anger, 'you may sacrifice yourself if you like, but you have no right to sacrifice your daughter.'

A lively discussion began, and Pillerault worked himself up.

'Eh! If Popinot lent you nothing,' cried he; 'if he had looked upon you as his partner; if he chose to consider the money that he paid over to your creditors for your interest in the Oil as an advance on account of the profits, so that you should not be robbed——'

'It would look as though I had arranged with him to cheat my creditors.'

Pillerault pretended to be defeated by this logic. He knew enough of human nature to guess that during the night the good man would argue out the case with himself; and those private reflections of his would accustom him to the idea of rehabilitation.

'But how came my wife and daughter to be in our old house?' he asked at dinner.

'Anselme means to take one of the floors, and he and Césarine will set up housekeeping there. Your wife is on his side. They have had the banns put up without telling you, so as to compel you to give your consent. Popinot says that there will be less merit in marrying Césarine after you are rehabilitated. You accept the King's six thousand francs, and yet you will take nothing from your relatives! Now, for my own part, I am quite justified in giving you a receipt in full; would you refuse it?'

'No,' said César. 'But it would not hinder me from saving the money to pay you, receipt or no.'

'All this is splitting hairs,' said Pillerault, 'and when honesty is in question, I ought to be allowed to know what is right. What folly were you talking just now? When your creditors are all paid in full, will you still persist that you have cheated them?'

César looked full at Pillerault as he spoke, and it touched the older man to see a bright smile on his nephew's face after three years of dejection.

'You are right,' he said, 'they would be paid.—But it is like selling my daughter!'

'And I wish to be bought,' cried Césarine, who came in with Popinot.

The lovers stealing on tiptoe through the lobby had overheard the words. Mme. Birotteau was just behind them. The three had made a round in a cab, asking all the creditors to meet in Crottat's office that evening; Popinot's lover's logic bore down César's scruples; but he still persisted in calling himself a debtor, and would have it that he was outflanking the law by a substitution. Conscience yielded to an outburst from Popinot—

'So you mean to kill your daughter, do you?'

'Kill my daughter!' echoed César, bewildered.

'Well, now,' said Popinot, 'what is there to prevent me from making a deed of gift in your favour of a sum which on my conscience I believe to be yours? Can you refuse?'

'No,' said César.

'Good. Then let us go to Alexandre Crottat this evening, so that there shall be no going back upon it, and our marriage contract can be decided at the same time.'

An application for reinstatement and all the necessary certificates were duly deposited by Derville at the office of the Procureur-Général of the Court of Appeal.

During the month which elapsed between the putting up of the banns and the marriage, and during the progress of the formalities, César lived in a state of constant nervous excitement. He was ill at ease. He feared that he might not live to see the great day when his disabilities should be formally removed. His pulse throbbed unaccountably, he said, and he complained of a dull pain about the heart. He had been exhausted by painful emotion, and this supreme joy was wearing him out. Decrees of rehabilitation are rare in Paris; there is scarcely one in ten years.

There is something indescribably solemn and imposing in the ceremonial of justice for those who take society seriously. An institution is to men as they consider it, and is invested with dignity and grandeur by their thoughts. When a nation has ceased, not to feel the religious instinct, but to believe; when primary education relaxes the bonds of union by teaching children a habit of merciless analysis, a nation is dissolved; for the only ties that are left to bind men together and make of them one body are the ignoble ties of material interest, and the dictates of the selfish cult created by egoism well carried out. Birotteau, sustained by religion, saw Justice as Justice ought to be regarded among men, as the expression of society itself; beneath the forms he saw the sovereign will, the laws by which men have agreed to live. If the magistrate is old, feeble, and whitehaired, so much the more solemn does his priestly office appear, an office which demands so profound a study of human nature and of things, an office to which the heart is immolated, for of necessity it becomes callous in a guardian of so many palpitating interests.

In these days the men who cannot ascend the staircase of the Court of Appeal in the old Palais de Justice in Paris, without feeling deeply stirred, are growing rare; but Birotteau was one of these men. There are not many who notice the majestic grandeur of that staircase,

so magnificently planned to produce an effect. It rises at the further end of the peristyle which adorns the Cour du Palais. The doorway opens on the centre of the gallery which leads from the vast Salle des Pas Perdus at its one end to the Sainte-Chapelle at the other, two monuments which may well dwarf everything about them into insignificance. The Church of St. Louis is in itself one of the grandest buildings in Paris, and there is an indescribable dim atmosphere of romance about it when approached by way of this gallery; while the vast Salle des Pas Perdus is flooded with daylight, and it is hard to forget the memories of the history of France that cling about its walls. So the staircase must have a grandeur of its own if it is not utterly overshadowed by the glories of those two famous buildings. Perhaps there is something to stir the soul at the sight of the place where decrees are executed, beheld through the rich scroll-work of the screen of the Palais. The staircase gives entrance to a vast room, the Salle des Pas Perdus of this court, beyond which lies the Hall of Audience. Imagine the feeling with which Birotteau (always so much impressed by the circumstance of justice) mounted the staircase among a little crowd of his friends—Lebas, at that time President of the Tribunal of Commerce; Camusot, who had acted as registrar; Ragon, his old master; and the Abbé Loraux, his confessor. The presence of the good priest enhanced these earthly honours by a reflection from heaven, which gave them yet more value in César's eyes.

Pillerault, that practical philosopher, had bethought him of the expedient of dwelling upon and exaggerating the joy of the release, so that the actual experience might not overwhelm César. Just as he finished dressing, he found himself surrounded by faithful friends, all anxious for the honour of accompanying him to the bar of the Court. The delight which suffused the good man's soul at the sight of this group raised him to a pitch of happiness necessary for him if he was to endure the alarming

ordeal. He found others of his friends standing in the Great Hall of Audience, where a dozen Councillors were sitting.

After the cases had been called, Birotteau's attorney made application in a brief formula. At a sign from the President, the Attorney-General rose to give his opinion. In the name of the Court, the Attorney-General, the public accuser, was about to make demand that the merchant's honour, which had been pledged, should be vindicated; a proceeding unique in law, for a condemned man can only be pardoned. Those who have hearts that feel can imagine Birotteau's feelings when M. de Granville spoke somewhat as follows:—

'Gentlemen,' said the great lawyer, 'on the 16th of January 1820, Birotteau was declared a bankrupt by the Tribunal of Commerce of the Seine. The insolvency was not occasioned by imprudence on the part of the merchant, nor by dishonest speculation, nor any other cause which could stain his honour. We feel that it is necessary to state it publicly—the calamity was brought about by one of those disasters which occur from time to time, to the great affliction of Justice and of the city of Paris. It was reserved for this present century, in which the evil leaven of subverted morals and revolutionary ideas will long ferment, to behold the Parisian notariat depart from the honourable traditions of its past; there have been more cases of insolvency in that body during the last few years than in two preceding centuries under the ancient monarchy. The greed of gold rapidly acquired has seized upon officials, those guardians of the public welfare and intermediary authorities.'

Then followed a tirade based on this text, in the course of which M. le Comte de Granville (speaking in character) took occasion to incriminate Liberals, Bonapartists, and all and sundry who were disaffected, as in duty bound. Events have shown that there was good ground for the Councillor's apprehensions.

'The immediate cause of the plaintiff's ruin was the action of a Paris notary, who absconded with the money which Birotteau deposited with him. The sentence passed by the Court in Roguin's case shows how shamefully he had betrayed his client's trust. A *concordat* followed. We will observe, for the honour of the applicant, that the proceedings were characterised by honesty not to be met with in the scandalous failures which daily occur in Paris. Birotteau's creditors, gentlemen, found every trifle that he possessed, down to trinkets and articles of wearing apparel belonging not only to him, but to his wife, who, to swell the assets, gave up all that she had. Birotteau at this juncture showed himself worthy of the respect which he had won by the discharge of his municipal functions; for he was at that time deputy-mayor of the second arrondissement, and had just received the Cross of the Legion of Honour accorded to the devoted Royalist, who shed his blood for the cause on the steps of Saint-Roch in Vendémiaire; and, no less, to the Consular judge, who had won respect by his ability, and popularity by his conciliatory spirit; to the modest municipal officer, who declined the honours of the mayoralty for himself, and put forward the name of another as more worthy—the honourable Baron de la Billardière, one of the noble Vendeans whom he had learned to esteem in evil days.'

'He put that better than I did,' said César in his uncle's ear.

'The creditors, therefore, receiving sixty per cent. of their claims, thanks to the upright merchant and his wife and daughter, who surrendered everything that they possessed, gave expression to their respect in the *concordat*, by which they forwent the remainder of their claims in consideration of the dividend. The attention of the Court is called to the manner in which this record is worded.'—Here the Attorney-General read the *concordat*. —'After such expressions of goodwill, gentlemen, many

a trader would have considered himself free, and would have walked with head erect in public; but so far from considering his liabilities to be discharged, Birotteau would not give way to despair, but made an inward resolution to hasten the coming of a glorious day which here and now dawns for him. Nothing turned him aside from his purpose. Our beloved sovereign gave a post to the man who was wounded at Saint-Roch, and the bankrupt merchant set by the whole of his salary for the benefit of his creditors, for the devotion of his family did not fail him——'

Tears came into Birotteau's eyes as he squeezed his uncle's hand.

'His wife and daughter poured their earnings into the common treasury; they too had embraced Birotteau's loyal purpose. They descended from their position to take a subordinate place. Such sacrifices as these, gentlemen, deserve all honour, for they are the hardest of all. This was the task which Birotteau laid upon himself.'

The Attorney read an abbreviated version of the schedule, giving the names of the creditors and the balances due to them.

'Every one of these amounts, gentlemen, has been paid (interest included). The receipts have not been given by notes of hand which demand investigation, but by certificates of payment made in the presence of a notary, documents which do not abuse the good faith of the Court, though, nevertheless, the inquiries required by the law have been duly made. You, therefore, restore to Birotteau not his honour, but the civil and political privileges of which he has been deprived, and in so doing you do justice. Such cases come so seldom before you, that we cannot refrain from giving expression to our admiration of the conduct of the applicant, who has already received the encouragement of august patronage.'

With that, he read the formal application. The

Court deliberated without retiring, and the President rose to pronounce the decree.

'The Court charges me to inform M. Birotteau of the satisfaction with which the decree, granted under such circumstances, is passed.—Call the next case.'

Birotteau, already invested with a caftan of honour by the Attorney-General's speech, was struck dumb with joy when he heard these solemn words from the President of the Highest Court of Appeal in France, words which made those who heard them feel that the impassive Themis had a heart. He could not move from his place, he seemed to be glued to the floor, and gazed with bewildered eyes at the Councillors, who seemed to him like angels who had opened the gates which admitted him to life among his fellows. His uncle took him by the arm and drew him away. Then César, who had not obeyed the desire of Louis XVIII., fastened the red ribbon at his buttonhole, like a man in a dream, and went down in triumph with his friends about him to the hackney cab.

'Where are you taking me?' he asked of Joseph Lebas, Pillerault, and Ragon.

'Home.'

'No. It is three o'clock; I want to go on 'Change again, now that I have the right.'

'To the Exchange,' Pillerault gave the order, and looked significantly at Lebas, for there were symptoms which made him uneasy; he feared for Birotteau's reason.

So Birotteau went back on 'Change between his uncle and Joseph Lebas; the two merchants whom every one respected linked their arms in his. The news of his rehabilitation was abroad. Du Tillet was the first to see the three and old Ragon, who followed behind.

'Ah! my dear master! Delighted to hear that you have pulled through your difficulties. Perhaps I contributed to bring about this happy termination by allowing

little Popinot to pluck me so easily. I am as glad of your happiness as if it were my own.'

'It is the only way open to you,' said Pillerault, 'for you will never experience it yourself.'

'What do you mean, sir?' asked du Tillet.

'A good dig in the ribs, by George,' said Lebas, smiling at Pillerault's malicious revenge. He knew nothing of the part that du Tillet had played, but he looked on him as a scoundrel.

Matifat saw César, and immediately all the most respected merchants crowded about the perfumer; he received an ovation on 'Change, the most flattering congratulations and handshakes, which caused here and there some heart-burnings, and here and there a pang of remorse, for fifty out of every hundred present had been insolvent at some time or other.

Gigonnet and Gobseck, chatting in a corner, stared at César as the learned must have stared when the first electric eel was brought for their inspection, and they beheld that strange curiosity, a living Leyden jar.

Then, still breathing the incense of triumph, César went out to the cab, and drove home to his house, where the marriage contract between his dear child Césarine and the devoted Popinot was to be signed that evening. He laughed nervously, in a way that alarmed his three old friends.

It is one of the mistakes of youth to imagine that every one has the vitality of youth, a defect nearly akin to its best endowment; for youth does not behold life through a pair of spectacles, but through the radiant hues of a reflected glow, and age itself is credited with its own exuberant life. Popinot, like César and Constance, cherished memories of the pomp and splendour of the ball, the strains of Collinet's orchestra had often rung in his ears; he had seen the gay throng of dancers, and tasted the joy so cruelly punished, as Adam and Eve might have thought of the forbidden fruit which

banished them from the Garden, and brought Death and Birth into the world, for it seems that the multiplication of the angels is one of the mysteries of the Paradise above.

Popinot, however, could think of that night's festivity not only without remorse, but with joy in his heart, for then it was that Césarine in all her glory had given her promise to him in his poverty. That evening he had known beyond all doubt that he was loved for himself alone. So when he paid Célestin for the rooms which Grindot had restored, and stipulated that everything should be left untouched; when he had carefully seen that the merest trifles belonging to César and Constance were in their place, he had dreamed of giving a ball there on the day of his wedding. The preparations for the fête had been a work of love. It should be exactly like the previous one, except in the extravagances. Extravagance was over and done with. Still, the dinner was to be served by Chevet, and the guests were almost the same. The Abbé Loraux took the place of the Grand-Chancellor; and Lebas, the President of the Tribunal of Commerce, was to be there. Popinot added M. Camusot's name to the list, as an acknowledgment of the kindness he had shown to Birotteau in so many ways. M. de Vandenesse and M. de Fontaine took the place of M. and Mme. Roguin.

Césarine and Popinot had exercised their discretion in the matter of invitations to the ball. They both shrank from making a festival of their wedding, and had avoided the publicity which jars on pure and tender hearts by giving the dance on the occasion of the signing of the contract. Constance had found the cherry-coloured velvet dress in which she had shone for the brief space of a single day; and Césarine had pleased herself by surprising Popinot in the ball-dress of which he had talked times out of mind. So the house was to wear the same air of an enchanted festival, and neither Constance, nor

Césarine, nor Anselme thought that there was any danger for César in this joyful surprise. They waited till four o'clock, and grew almost childish in their happiness.

After the hero of the hour had passed through the indescribable emotions of returning to the Exchange, a fresh shock awaited him in the Rue Saint-Honoré. As he came up the stairs, which still looked new, he saw his wife in the cherry-coloured velvet dress; he saw Césarine, the Comte de Fontaine, the Vicomte de Vandenesse, the Baron de la Billardière, and the great Vauquelin; a light film spread over his eyes, and Uncle Pillerault, on whose arm he leant, felt the shudder that ran through his nephew.

'It is too much for him,' the old philosopher said to the enamoured Anselme; 'he will not stand all the wine which you have poured out for him.'

But all hearts beat so high with joy, that César's emotion and tottering steps were ascribed to an intoxication, very natural, as they thought—but not seldom fatal. When he looked round the drawing-room, and saw it filled with guests and women in ball toilets, the sublime rhythm of the *finale* of Beethoven's great symphony beat in his pulses and flooded his brain. That imaginary music streamed in on him like rays of light, sparkling from modulation to modulation; it was to be indeed the *finale* that rang clear and high through the recesses of the tired brain. Overcome by the harmony that swept through him, he laid his hand on his wife's arm, and in tones, rendered almost inaudible by the effort to keep back the flowing blood which filled his mouth—

'I am not well,' he said.

Constance, in alarm, led her husband toher room; he was barely able to reach the armchair, into which he sank, exclaiming, 'M. Haudry! M. Loraux!'

The Abbé came in, followed by the guests and women in evening dress, who stood in consternation. César in the midst of this brightly-coloured throng grasped his

confessor's hand, and laid his head on the breast of the wife who knelt beside him. A blood-vessel had been ruptured in the lungs, and the resulting aneurism was stopping his last breath.

'Behold the death of the righteous!' the Abbé Loraux said solemnly, as he stretched his hand towards César with one of those Divine gestures which Rembrandt's inspiration beheld and recorded in his picture of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead.

Christ bade Earth surrender her prey; the good priest sped a soul to heaven, where the martyr to commercial integrity should receive an unfading palm.

Printed by T. and A. Constable, Printers to Her Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press